

## ABSTRACT

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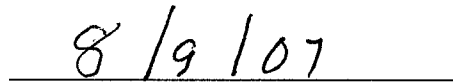
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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

Dialogic management in adult education promotes an outstanding organizational practice for adult learning centers. Regularly, low literate and working-class people have been excluded from management and decision-making positions of the adult learning organizations they attend. This study focused on adult learners' participation in decision-making and shared management of their school. A case study was conducted in an adult school in Barcelona, Spain, investigating how a school for adults is collective-centered and how adult learners perceive their participation in the school management. Learners and educators are engaged in the decisions such as funding, scheduling, designing projects and activities, and building partnerships at a local, national, and international level. The involvement of learners in decision-making teams is essential to the success of shared governance and other participative structures, and is one of the aspects that explain the higher levels of participation in the school. The study is centered on the strategies used within the community organization for the implementation of democratic adult educational practices and how those successful experiences help or hinder the overcoming of social exclusion.

The results of the study support theories and practices that emphasize the value of learners' participation in the management of the adult school. The consequences of such participation affect not only the individual but the center, the people around the participants, and the community.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

DIALOGIC MANAGEMENT IN ADULT EDUCATION:

A CASE STUDY IN SPAIN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING, ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	viii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Study.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Research Questions.....	5
Summary of Methodology.....	5
Definitions.....	6
Limitations of the Study.....	7
Need for the Study.....	7
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
Participation in Decision Making and Management.....	11
Adult Education in Spain.....	14
Democratic Adult Education.....	19
Dialogic Approaches.....	30



Chapter	Page
3. METHODOLOGY.....	37
Research Design.....	37
Research Questions.....	38
Justification of the Methodology Selected.....	40
Case Study: The School of La Verneda – Sant Martí.....	47
Data Collection.....	53
Data Analysis.....	56
Trustworthiness and Validity.....	57
4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS.....	60
Data analysis from the participants’ point of view.....	60
Summary of the dialogic management analysis from the participants’ point of view.....	105
Data analysis from the teachers’ point of view.....	113
Summary of the dialogic management analysis from the educators’ point of view.....	142
5. CONCLUSIONS.....	147
Implications of the Study.....	156
Recommendations for Further Research.....	159
REFERENCES.....	160
APPENDICES.....	170

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Basic dimensions of the theoretical conceptions.....	46
2. Analysis of the emerging categories from the participants' discourse .....	62
3. Analysis of the emerging categories from the participants' discourse according to research questions.....	107
4. Analysis of the emerging categories from the educators' discourse.....	114
5. Number of segments coded by category.....	173

## LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix	Page
A. LIST OF QUESTIONS.....	170
B. TABLE CATEGORIES.....	172

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of the Study**

Social, political, economic, and individual risks of contemporary society are beyond the institution's protection, which is Beck's (1999) explanation of today's global risk society. In the present Information Society the ability of processing and selecting relevant information is the central cause for the success or failure of individuals, groups and institutions (Flecha, Gomez, & Puigvert, 2003). Several current social theories emphasize the importance of democracy and the creation of dialog in conditions for living together (Castells, 2004). These theories point out the importance of the participation of all the actors affected and that take part in society. From these positions it is may be posited that education is the key for social promotion, and that education can lead to equal opportunities for everybody.

International organizations such as UNESCO (2004) remind us that adult education, especially literacy, should be a gateway to fuller participation in social, cultural, political, and economic life. UNESCO and other European institutions, such as the European Commission, have claimed the need to have a more inclusive and participatory civil society and cooperation between all stakeholders in education (ETGACE, 2002). Some recommendations for practitioners are, among others, to make citizenship and democracy central to the design of adult education programs.

Adult education in most contexts is going through a process of democratization, following the same tendency of society. In Spain and other European countries learners are organizing themselves and demanding to share with teachers and administrators the decision making about their education (CONFAPEA, 2004).

A concern of many adult educators, administrators, and researchers is how to make the learning experience in adult education settings a more participatory and democratic experience driven to active citizenship (UNESCO, 1997). A review of literature on adult education management approaches suggests that effective management in adult education requires the management of the learners themselves. This study assumes that an approach called dialogic management could be effective for developing democratic and participatory education in adult education centers.

In studying management participation, researchers have long been interested in who participates and the rationale for their participation. On the one hand, studies of shared decision-making in school organizations and shared governance have been conducted mostly in children schools, from the teachers' perspective, the principal's perspective (Jones, 1998) or with the parents' participation (Serico, 1998). On the other hand, Soler-Gallart's dialogic reading (2001) and Valls's communicative organization (2005) explain how participants' learning is defined in adult education. However, no studies have investigated the perception of learners in the participation of school management. This study examined the functioning of dialogic management and the perception of learners in the management of an adult center.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem addressed in this study was the lack of research which has analyzed the perceptions of learners actively involved in the management of the adult education center in which they participate.

Although dialogic learning has been studied in adult education contexts in relation to reading (Soler-Gallart, 1996), to didactic of mathematics (Diez, 2004) and to a communicative model in relation to an organization (Valls, 2005), no studies have been conducted which focus on learners' perceptions in the dialogic management of an adult education center.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effects of participation in educational, cultural and social transformation practices within community centers such as schools for adults and associations of learners, which have formed part of a social movement in Spain since the mid 1970s. This movement depicts and explains democratic adult education and participatory practices within these community organizations with regard to social transformation and the overcoming of social inequalities. Participatory practices were defined as individual and collective processes implemented by learners, administrators, and other members of the community to develop abilities to participate in the management and administration of the organizations and consequently in society (Walters, 1989). The study focused on the strategies used within the community organizations for the implementation of democratic adult educational practices.

Adult education was examined -- and specifically how the dialogic management of the educational centers function and how those successful experiences help or hinder the overcoming of social exclusion. Dialogic management in adult education appeared to

promote an outstanding organizational practice for adult learning centers. Habitually, low literate, working-class people have been excluded from management and decision-making positions of the adult learning organizations they attend. Dialogic management in adult education is defined by three main characteristics: a) the organization targets the participants who are at risk of social exclusion, b) the process is based on dialogic learning, and c) the group works towards the democratization of adult education.

The purpose of the study was twofold. First, the research responded to the need within the adult education literature for research to be undertaken that examines educational practices within social movements and adult education from the learner's perspective. There has been an abundance of research on participation in adult education, but there is not sufficient research on learners' management of the organizations in which they are involved. The second purpose for the study was to describe and explain different kinds of transformations that learners' participation creates in the management of the organizations such as theoretical aspects of education, community social transformations, or political transformations.

This study focused on the process of becoming involved in the management of the learning center. I investigated how participants interact with each other and with the workers of the center, how they perceived their participation, and what being part of the management meant for these learners. Furthermore, I studied the aspects of the learning centers that helped to promote social and educational change. Based on those findings, I identified the factors that may promote other organizations to encourage democratically driven adult education and resourceful learners' participation in the organizations. In order to conduct the analysis of the elements that learners bring to their participation in

educational, cultural, and social transformations I took into account Habermas's theories, mainly his dual conception of society. Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* explains that social systems are conformed by two worlds: the life world and the systems world.

This study attempted to shed light on the impact of dialogic management in learners' participation in adult education. Specifically, this study explores how learners' participation in management of the center is perceived, as well as how dialogic management works.

### **Research Questions**

Two central questions guided this study:

1. What occurs in the dialogic management of the learning center?
  - 1.1 How do adult learners interact with others and educators?
  - 1.2 What do adult learners perceive the dialogic management promotes?
2. How do adult learners perceive their participation in the dialogic management?

### **Summary of Methodology**

This study was designed as a qualitative case study to investigate the perceptions of the functioning of dialogic learning by individuals involved in the management of the center within adult education. The case in this study was an urban adult education center conducting dialogic management in Barcelona, Spain.

Data were collected from learners and educators who participated in the management of the center. This study was made up of three key parts: interviews, focus



groups, and observations. A critical communicative approach was used in this study, which is promoting and taking into account the centrality of dialog and participation in the construction of knowledge, and not prioritizing the accumulation of information, but the use of it and its results. Individual interviews were conducted with 4 educators and 14 learners of the center. Focus groups were conducted -- one with educators and one with learners. Observations were done for group meetings and document analysis for learners' evaluations and projects.

The data were analyzed in two phases. The analysis was supported by the use of MAXQDA2 computer software. The first phase focused on identifying themes explaining learners' perceptions of their participation in the dialogic management of the center. The second phase of analysis was conducted to investigate the transformational and the exclusionary factors perceived by learners and educators of this center.

### **Definitions**

*Shared decision-making* describes a process that involves a combination of participants, educators, volunteers, and community members in decision-making with regard to the school for adults. This participation varies from one meeting to another, from giving their opinion to exercising the agreements in the association's statute.

*Deliberative democracy* is described by Elster (1998) as the "decision making by discussion among free and equal citizens. The idea that democracy revolves around the transformation rather than simply the aggregation of preferences" (p.1).

*Active citizenship* is the active role in the community by the citizenry, for example, by improving services or volunteering.

*Validity claims* are communicative speech acts in which the strength of the arguments are used to make a claim prevail. On the contrary, power claims are speech acts imposing an argument of force (Habermas, 1984).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The following are limitations in the extent and reason of this study. Dialogic management was studied in the context of Spain, and for that reason, this study is not generalizable to other political, social, and/or cultural contexts. This study was limited to adult education. Therefore, its findings should not be generalized to other areas of education or management.

This study limited its extent to the perceptions of learners and educators that took place during the period from the start of their participation in the center, which is highly different among participants. A more longitudinal approach may provide more information in the impact of dialogic management on adult education and the culture of the organization.

Future research may include the perceptions of policy makers and politicians as well as other learners' cultures and ethnic groups not present in this study.

### **Need for the Study**

This study made several contributions to the areas of adult education and learners' participation. On the one hand, the research on models and trends of adult education provided examples of practices that promote emancipation, liberation, and social awareness. On the other hand, the research involved elements that promoted practices in

which individuals accurately defined what they wanted. Simultaneously, they made possible the definition of educational practices that contribute to the overcoming of inequalities. In addition, this model of organization explained one of the approaches to stimulate the participation in the management of adult educational centers. This research should contribute to the knowledge base of participation in adult education and adult learning.

Other researchers may use the findings of this study as a foundation for future research on this topic. For example, future research can examine the relationship between organizational and educational practices and changes in government policies in adult education.

Lastly, the importance of dialogic management may reside in the political, sociological, and educational impact that it has on the creation of learning spaces for transformation and nurturance of equality.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the theoretical approaches that inform the practices developed in the dialogic management of an adult learning center in Spain. Although there have been many debates about educational issues such as learning communities and power relationships, little attention has been given to how learners perceive their participation in the management of a center.

This dissertation is centered in the case of Spain. As I explain further on in this chapter, adult education in Spain had a popular origin: it arose from the initiatives of the people living in rural areas, in areas of the north of the Iberian Peninsula, by the end of the 18th century. However, this social initiative lost the participatory and popular aspect when the administration tried to institutionalize adult education (Flecha, López & Saco, 1988). At that moment another way appeared to manage this education, with deep consequences for adult learners in terms of participation and involvement. The institutionalization of adult education was developed from a compensatory point of view. This view was based on the deficits of the individuals as opposed to using learners' prior knowledge to facilitate more learning. Adult education was conceptualized as a way to resolve the population deficits of reading and writing, and that conceptualization meant a burden for adult education because it adopted the roles of formal schooling (children's education) that on many occasions were not able to respond to the needs of adults (Flecha, López & Saco, 1988).

Resistance to this adult education conceptualization began to appear. Adult learners, at least in the case of Spain, searched for ways to meet and promote a more global educational approach, less traditional, with more participatory aspects. At the international level, the 19<sup>th</sup> General Conference of UNESCO (1976) established a point of reference, because the term *permanent education* was coined, widening the idea of a restricted formal education to become a global and social education based in the prior knowledge of adult individuals. In Europe, the *Delors Report* (1996) further contributed towards a “social” turn of the institutions for an inclusive and participatory adult education.

This review of literature provides a framework for understanding the context and the origins of adult education in Spain and the fundamentals of dialogic management.

The conceptual framework for the study includes:

1. Participation in decision making and management
2. Adult education in Spain
3. Democratic adult education
4. Dialogic approaches

This chapter will explore the literature that is relevant to understanding the involvement and participation of adult learners in the management of the center where they learn. This is not meant to be an exhaustive review of the literature. It is intended to familiarize the reader with the basic assumptions about participation and management in adult education that went into the design of this study and the interpretation of the results.

### **Participation in Decision Making and Management**

In studying management participation and participation in decision making, researchers have long been interested in who participates and the rationale for their participation. On the one hand, studies of shared decision-making in school organizations and shared governance have been conducted mostly in children's schools, from the teachers' perspective, the principal's perspective (Jones, 1998), or with the parents' participation (Serico, 1998). However, no studies have investigated the perception of adult learners in the participation of the school management. This study therefore examined the functioning of dialogic management and the perception of learners in the management of the center.

Learning has been defined from different theoretical perspectives. From a cognitive learning theory perspective, learning is defined as a process of knowledge delivery from a knowledgeable source to a target lacking that knowledge (Gherardi et al., 1998). In the organizational learning literature under individual learning theory, learning is considered a specific activity. Elkjaer (2005) explains that learning happens when a discontinuity is introduced, when there is a problem to be solved. And under the social learning theory, learning is an integral part of the practice in everyday organizational life and work (Nicolini & Meznar, 1995). Therefore learning is not restricted to individuals' minds but as processes of participation and interaction (Gherardi et al., 1998). Research is lacking in the literature in the area of "organizing" the organizational context for organizational learning (Elkjaer, 2005).

Some research has been developed in the area of involving learners in the provision and delivery of adult learning (Jude, 2003) but little has been developed in the

area of democratically managing the learning center. Within adult education the study of management and organizations has been widely studied in the area of Human Resource Development. Management and decision making has been largely studied and discussed from different perspectives; with a focus on organizational learning (Cyert & March, 1963; Argyris & Schön, 1978/1996; Nevis et al., 1995; Pedler & Aspinwall, 1998; Senge et al. 1999); learning organizations (Senge, 1990; Fenwick, 1996); and organizational knowledge management in the corporate world (Alavi & Tiwana, 2005).

The topic of management in the organization has been analyzed from different approaches. The traditional approaches highlight the planning as a linear and hierarchical process in the decision-making process. Often this area has been studied from the point of view of power relations among the people involved in the organization (Sork & Caffarella, 1989). Another point of view is one that proposes the importance of the context and highlights aspects such as the ethical dilemmas in the planning process (Cervero & Wilson, 1994). According to these authors, planning is a “social activity in which planners negotiate interests” (p. 31) in the framework of the social context in which the people who make the decisions are located. The analysis proposed by these authors is still marked by the study of power relations, although they also accept that social context may structure (determine) the decisions in the decision-making process of the organization. Forester (1993), based on the contributions of Habermas (1984), suggested a model of analysis of decision making that was centered in communicative action. This author recognizes that in organizations there are decision-making processes that are instrumental; however, some occasions necessitate all parties reaching

agreements by consensus. In this setting the communicative actions (and the spaces that promote those actions) are the ones that explain how the decision making is produced.

In the field of adult education there is a considerable gap in the study of management and decision-making models. Caffarella (1988) explains the ethical dilemmas that educators face when teaching adults. From her point of view, the activity of teaching/learning in adult education “requires all participants in the learning activity, teachers and students alike, to be willing to question what is being taught and how the subject matter is being addressed” (p. 114). Valls (2005) presents an analysis of a school for adults in which the learner plays a pivotal role in the management of the center. Valls (2005) explains a perspective in which the management is not only restricted by the context (different from the model defended by Cervero and Wilson, 1994), but is a product of agreements and consensus decisions of the participants in the center. Valls (2005) as well as Forester (1993) also cite the theory of communicative action of Habermas (1984) as the theoretical reference of this management model.

Therefore, starting from the basis that there is a scarce amount of research in the area of participatory management in adult education centers, the references above indicate (at least) two fundamental means of understanding this management model. From the perspective of power relations, the management is understood as a process in which educators take the initiative. Ideas such as “ethical dilemmas” or the pressure of the “social context” are part of the understanding of the management. On the other hand, this management may be also understood as a process in which all the people participate, through spaces where it is possible to reach agreements, and debate how to plan the education. This classification coincides with the two models of education suggested by



Medina (1997) in his doctoral dissertation. Medina (1997) explains a scholar model that is based in formal education and controlled and directed by the educator, in which the adult learners participate only as pupils. Opposite to this model of teaching adults, Medina (1997) presents a social model, in which the adult learners are at the center and main protagonists of their education, participating actively in it (that is the reason for naming them participants and not students). The school in which I have conducted the fieldwork for this dissertation case study belongs to the second model of adult education.

### **Adult Education in Spain**

The origin of adult education in Spain comes from the popular initiatives. The preserved documentation proves that in some rural areas of the north of Spain (specifically in the current provinces of Biscay and Guipúzcoa) the neighbors used to get together at the end of the day in the *house of the village* to play, eat, and talk. These informal meetings were the basis for the Economic Societies of Friends of the Country, that like Flecha, López and Saco (1988) explain, had their origin in the Vascongada Society, founded by the Count of Peñaflorinda in 1764, from which the Seminar of Vergara arose. This seminar was a space for study and promotion of literacy that the Count of Peñaflorinda created after observing the spontaneous meetings of neighbors in the houses of the villages of the rural centers in Biscay and Guipúzcoa. Later events explain the development of adult education in Spain, which made a lot of progress during the minimal period of the First Republic (1873-1874). Adult Education tended to “disappear” from the official texts before it slowly became institutionalized. In the Constitution of 1812, a milestone of the modern history of Spain, adult education is not

referenced. The *Quintana Report* (1814) was the first document assigned to address education in Spain from the institutions, and it made one of the first formal acknowledgments of adult education in Spain. Flecha, López and Saco (1988) explain that

However, in the Report it did not lack awareness on this issue, to which is alluded to in several occasions. In the section on General Basis of all Education, expresses that the education 'should be universal, that is, spread out to all citizens (...). It should embrace the entire system of human knowledge and ensure to all men of all ages in life the facility to maintain their knowledge and acquire new ones.' (p. 26)

From that point forward adult education emerged (with regard to the institutions) in Spain. Clear differences appeared between the popular initiatives, born from the will of people to get together and study and learn together, and how the State decided to organize education (Flecha, López & Saco, 1988). The Basque peasants that met at the end of the 18th century in the houses of the village in their respective towns soon agreed to divide different topics for each night of the week. The documents of the time provide the evidence that in those gatherings Monday nights were dedicated to math only, on Tuesday it was physics, on Wednesday history and translations of the academic members of the social gathering, on Thursday music, Friday geography, on Saturday conversations about the weather, and Sundays were usually assigned for music (Flecha, López & Saco, 1988). Almost a century later, in 1865, Luis Puig i Sevall, director of a public school in Barcelona, wrote (Flecha, López & Saco, 1988):

We have attended in several occasions to some of those night schools [schools open by the State], and in spite of being all ran by renowned professors we observed always certain uneasiness or discomfort, that proved the tension and violence lived by both professors and students that remained there (...) But it does not surprise us. Without organization, without method,

without a specific system, not even a place to fix your glance; the professor, disheartened, teaches and the student gets bored and annoyed. (p. 28)

The preceding quote suggests the existence of a clear difference between the adult education organized by the State and the one organized by the same people (a difference that currently still exists in the schools and associations of adult education in Spain). On the other hand, the quote supports the importance of dissertations such as this one (at least in the Spanish context) that provides an in-depth analysis of the dialogic model of management of adult education. This model has roots in this popular tradition of self-management of the gatherings and neighbors' meetings at the end of the 18th century in Spain.

Adult education in Spain has been suffering changes and gradual improvements since it first appeared. During the 19th century Spain was one of the countries with higher levels of illiteracy. In the last quarter of the 19th century, adult literacy was spreading around Septentrional and Occidental Europe. Only in countries such as Belgium and Ireland, 75% of the men knew how to write their name. Around 1900, the literacy rate in Hungary, Italy, Russia, Spain, and the Balkan area was much more inferior to the other areas of Europe (UNESCO, 2006). During the first part of the 20th century, there was an overall increase in the literacy levels in Europe. Over the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century adult education continued to develop, mainly from a social and popular perspective, such as the community centers known as "houses of the village" and the Libertarian Athenaeums across the country (Flecha, López & Saco, 1988).

The Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship after the war meant a regression of adult education in Spain. During the dictatorship period education in general was used as

a tool of propaganda by the dictator in power, Francisco Franco. Education's main purpose was to indoctrinate individuals in the political principles of the regime. The 1960s' national literacy plan was the beginning of policy development on adult education in Spain with the creation of the first adult education centers by the end of the decade.

In 1975 Franco died and three years later, after a period of democratic transition, the Spanish Constitution (1978) was approved in which the grounds of the current Spanish democracy were set. Those first years of the democratic period were years of innovative education and years of experimentation. Velaz (2005) states that from the 1980s onward there was a shift from a centralized management model to a decentralized one in adult education as well as a shift from a deficit-based education model to a social model based on the idea of continuing education.

The initial years of democracy in Spain carried the legacy of an educational system established at the end of the dictatorship period, with the General Law of Education of 1970. This law promoted a less traditional approach to adult literacy with the idea of continuing education as a social need but maintaining a children's school curriculum. The "White Book" for Adult Education (1986) accentuated learning based on experience and stressed that adults need to pursue an active and social life through a lifelong and flexible process. One of the main innovations of the 1990 Organic Act on the General Organization of the Education System (LOGSE) placed Adult Education outside general or special education. Adult education was no longer regarded as part of the school system but as an activity for personal, social, and professional promotion. At that moment, adult education was under the Department of Welfare and not under the Department of Education. The decentralization process reached its peak in 2000 when

oversight of education was transferred to the Autonomous Communities Governments. That is, the central State government transferred the network of adult education centers to its regional counterparts. In 2002 the Act on Qualifications and Vocational Training facilitated the creation of the National System for Qualifications and Vocational Training based in the European principles of lifelong learning. Although the Acts and legislation in this matter portrays openness and a social orientation, those portrayals are far from reality. The daily practices, although being in a democratic path, are much more conservative and fixed in practices of the past.

In addition to being developed and administered by the government, contemporary adult education programs in Spain are presently highly supported by NGOs, unions, and local initiatives, as well as participants' initiatives that manage to sponsor their programs with local, regional, state, and European funding. An example of this initiative is the Democratic Adult Education movement in Spain which is promoted by the national Confederation of Associations of Participants in Adult Education (*CONFAPEA*), with the support of the Educators' Network for Democratic Adult Education (*REDA*) and the Spanish network of researchers and scholars in adult education (*Grupo 90*). *CONFAPEA* stands for *Confederación de Asociaciones de Educación de Personas Adultas*, *REDA* stands for *Red de Educación Democrática de Personas Adultas*, and *Grupo 90* was named as such because the Spanish network of adult education researchers and professors was founded in 1990. The EDA movement is also the result of several years of work in which the participants have increasingly organized themselves from the local to the national level.

### **Democratic Adult Education**

Contemporary societies are diverse and changing. Societies have to confront the challenges of globalization, as well as the opening of the market, culture, and education. Adult education must be responsive to those needs. Current social theories emphasize the importance of democracy and within it the creation of dialog conditions for living together (Castells, 2004; Flecha, Gómez, & Puigvert, 2001). These theories recommend the participation of all actors affected by and taking part in society. From these positions it may be posited that education is the key for social promotion, and that education can lead to equal opportunities for everyone.

The hierarchic organization of society, which is characteristic of the industrial society, is an obsolete organization in the contemporary information society. In addition, social and cultural impacts are facilitating the organization of social movements. Social movements are being organized by means of strengthened egalitarian objectives, consensus processes, and the inclusion of voices of all stakeholders (Beck, 1999). Furthermore, Gelpi (1996) asserted that “working class movements, in their political and cultural trade union action, have developed adult education as an instrument of struggle and emancipation” (p. 129). This assertion provides evidence that adult education has been linked to participation from grassroots proposals.

Several scholars explore the relationship between social participation, social movements, and adult education; for example, communities that organize to provide literacy classes (Picon, 1991), and alternative models to formal education (Paulston & Letroy, 1982), such as popular education (La Belle, 1987, 2000). Research also demonstrates that engaging in Freirean education practices can induce social activism

(Puigvert, 2001; Stromquist, 1994). Also, many studies examined social movements that utilized education to pursue social justice such as the Civil Rights movement in the USA (Morris, 1984; Rachal, 2000).

Adult education and education in general can be fundamental to creating transformational possibilities. Societies around the world have inequalities to overcome. The idea of education underlying the aspiration to achieve important social purposes is not new (Welter, 1962). But in the context of the information-based global society education increasingly enables social mobility, thus explaining its centrality to movements pursuing social justice. The need to have a more inclusive and participatory civil society that involves cooperation among all stakeholders in education has been internationally acknowledged (UNESCO, 2004). Some recommendations for practitioners are, among others, to make citizenship and democracy central to the design of adult education programs.

Participation is one of the most widely studied areas in adult education (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Adult education responds to a model that guarantees participants the possibility of acquiring, updating, and completing knowledge as varied as, for example, basic education, work training, or social and cultural activities. Following these possibilities, adult education must be based on an organized and methodical model which permits flexibility for the rhythm and learning times of adults, allowing different training itineraries to be acquired in response to the needs and demands of adults. Program planners must also consider the individual psycho-pedagogical characteristics and social situations of adults. In Adult Education there are different areas: Basic Education, Training for the labor market, Training in cultural or leisure activities, and Education for

Citizenship. Adult Education must also ensure training in personal development, awareness of one's setting, and active social participation.

The need to discuss those concepts and do research on democracy, social justice, and citizenship with regard to participation in adult education is fundamental. There is plenty of literature on those issues (Banks, 2004; Coare & Johnston, 2003; D'Amico, 1981; Selman, 1991; Vasta, 2000). Contemporary society also needs adult educators who are determined in their pursuit of equality, justice, peace, and education for all.

Scholars in political economy and the sociology of knowledge as well as in the sociology of education have argued that public schools in complex industrial societies make available different types of educational experience and curriculum knowledge to students in different social classes. Bowles and Gintis (1976), for example, have argued that students in different social-class backgrounds are rewarded for classroom behaviors that correspond to personality traits allegedly rewarded in the different occupational class positions. Bernstein (1977), Bourdieu (1984), and Apple (1990), focusing on school knowledge, have argued that knowledge and skills leading to social power are made available to the advantaged social groups but do not operate for the working classes to whom a more "practical" curriculum is offered (manual skills, clerical knowledge).

Participation in adult education is defined as taking part in a learning process for adults. That is, "participation in adult education" is the engagement of the adult participant or learner in the process of making decisions, assessing, and defining goals in the organization where democratic adult education takes place. International organizations (such as UNESCO) proclaim that adult education (especially literacy) should be a gateway to fuller participation in social, cultural, political, and economic life



in all regions of the world (2004). Literacy enables individuals to function effectively in their societies and to fashion and shape them. In such a process, communities affect their own cultural and social transformations. Literacy must address the needs of both women and men, to enable them to understand the interconnections between personal, local, and global realities.

Habermas describes education in the language of social Darwinism (as cited in Castells et al., 1999). The situation entails educational curriculum that has become a factor in the process of social dualization as the selection of the fittest. Flecha (1999) adds that as the educational gap increases, stable workers are those with a university degree, and the unemployed are those without an elementary level of education (p. 66). For most people, formal education is a social good, a source of hope in the quest for individual improvement and social change (Stromquist, 1994).

On behalf of education, hooks (2003) agrees that “without ongoing movements for social justice in our nation, progressive education becomes all the more important since it may be the only location where individuals can experience support for acquiring a critical consciousness, for any commitment to end domination” (p. 45). Previously she states that democratic educators have to work to find ways to teach and share knowledge in a manner that does not reinforce existing structures of domination such as those of race, gender, class, religion, culture, or sexual orientation.

Freire (in Bell, Gaventa & Peters, 1990) poses several questions on behalf of the right of people to take history into their hands. He asks, “Do the people have the right or not to participate in the process of producing the new knowledge?” (p. 97). He declares that processes of social transformation imply change in the way of producing

economically but also “greater participation of the masses of the people in the process of power. Then it means to renew the understanding of power” (p. 97). Participation has to be understood not as the institutionalization of the protest, but the elaboration of more efficient policies, based in the previous consultation and in the profiting of the acquired experience (ETGACE, 2002). Freire (in Bell, Gaventa & Peters, 1990) suggests that the educator must know in favor of whom and in favor of what he or she wants. That suggestion means educators need to know against whom and against what they are working as educators.

Many times the practice of adult education is developed in the unique form of schooling. Illich (as cited in Collins, 1998) critiques schooling and expresses the idea that learners should not be subjected to mandatory education. His scheme of lifelong education for the people by the people would be facilitated through skill exchanges, reference services, and peer-matching arrangements (p. 16). According to Illich, schools get in the way of relevant learning which fosters personal competence and peoples’ capacities to develop genuine community. He adds, professional educators teach their students to become dependent on experts who, in turn, reinforce the dependency (p. 3).

The scholastic model is defined for curricula that are often indifferent to social needs and are often solely based in instrumental and academic competencies. The scholastic model often stresses the classroom as the predominant location for learning, and may overlook the importance of preparing individuals for a social, work, and educational life. For that reason, prior experiences are not taken into account or any other knowledge that can be learned at the same time in other contexts (Freire, 1970).

Therefore, the scholastic model starts from the deficit and not from what people have learned in other contexts.

The scholastic model creates a vicious circle that harms vulnerable groups, and often ends up being compensatory and reproductive training for participants. In such programs, many educators believe that the learners have very little interest in participation. Moreover, in such programs the learners are relegated to merely receiving information because program planners do not take into account the capacity of the participants for critique. In such programs, minimal egalitarian dialog exists between educator and learner. The participants are relegated to receive information and attend courses implemented through master classes. In this kind of model the educator is an expert who fills participants' heads with information and data and attempts to compensate for their deficits (Freire, 1970). This kind of relationship between educator and learner results in negative power relations. Another characteristic of the scholastic model is the strict bureaucracy carried out in the educational process. This type of bureaucracy promotes learners to adapt their needs to the system instead of the system adapting to their demands and needs.

As an alternative to the scholastic model, the social model (Medina, 1997) is responsive to grassroots populations and is aligned with the characteristics of social movements. The intent of the social model is not to compensate but to address social and educational inequalities. The social model involves prior experiences of the participants, high expectations, active participation, and egalitarian relations. This starting point allows the transformation process to emerge in an environment that promotes learning for

all participants without discriminating against people because of their ethnic group, age, culture, or social class.

The social model is premised on the belief that everybody can learn. This model starts from a “pedagogy of maximum,” meaning that learning can occur in all contexts (Coare & Johnston, 2004). The learning process it is not a closed process that has to be based in a classroom. Furthermore, learning is not restricted to a one-way transmission of information from the educator to the learner. Learning can occur in a wide variety of daily contexts. Another characteristic of the social model is its focus on promoting solidarity and its support of the idea that everybody has to participate in transforming difficulties into possibilities (Freire, 1997). In such a process, participants and educators are collaborative learners.

A central characteristic of the social model is to give priority to the learners who have a higher risk of social exclusion. Participants get better results and higher participation when their active participation is promoted and their voices are taken into account. The higher expectations that are set for them influence their level of motivation. This phenomenon not only changes their lives but also affects those around them in their social setting (FACEPA, 2002). The social model takes into account key elements for social inclusion like access, selection, and data processing. Therefore it promotes a learning that considers basic aspects of data selection and processing throughout peoples’ interactions (Ferrada, 2001).

In the social model, educators or facilitators provide their knowledge to participants by means of an egalitarian dialog, promoting participation and learning from participants. The participants contribute to the learning process by sharing their prior

experiences and their cultural background, promoting an egalitarian relationship that improves the learning quality. An underlying premise of this model is that reflection through dialog is a basic element that defines society and individuality (Beck 1999).

Adult education in some locales is currently going through a process of democratization, following tendencies of society. Participants are organizing themselves and demanding to share with teachers and administrators the decision making about their education. In this movement – called the Democratic Adult Education (DAE) Movement – they are reinventing popular education. The DAE movement follows the dialogic tendency of current society. However, it did not appear by chance, but as a result of many years of work within the field of adult education towards the democratization of education and culture. Freire (1987) argues that literacy should be inscribed inside a democratic adult education approach in which the participants of the learning process have the space and the opportunity to speak up and name the word and the world. He promotes that adult education needs to recover its radical democratic basis by promoting experiences that overcome social exclusion by gender, race, culture, and class. New channels and projects that foster the radicalization of democracy are emerging. As a result of many years of work within the field of adult education toward the democratization of education and culture the DAE movement appears to represent the interest of those people whose lack of academic studies, among other barriers, has excluded them from many positions in society.

Democratic Adult Education is carried out in a social model of adult education that consists of including the participant's voice in the decision-making places, in the management and the assessment processes. More and more, public decisions are carried

out by means of deliberative processes where citizens affected by the decisions take part in them even if they are not experts on the subject (Habermas, 1984). In order to legitimize the decisions, it depends on the inclusion of all the voices in the dialog process. The future of adult education is being dreamed and reinvented by the organizations and learners. Those proposals point to the same place as deliberative democracy and democracy radicalization achieving a better education directed to the present society. For example, Prajuli (as cited in Collins, 1998) is an educator with experience of popular education among community-based groups in Nepal. For him popular education as counter-discourse calls for the practice of a “bottom up” approach in contrast to the “trickle down” approach which has provided the rationale for modernizing schemes according to conventional development theory (p. 142). Again, according to Freire (1987), learners are able to transform the world through their actions and to express the reality in a creative language. By interacting with other people in schools and communities, adult learners raise questions about already held interpretations and collectively create new meanings that redefine them.

The DAE movement in Spain is a network of adult and cultural education associations, educators, researchers, and university professors who defend a social model of adult education. CONFAPEA (Confederation of Participants Associations) is one of the main pieces of DAE. CONFAPEA is an umbrella organization at the Spanish national level composed by associations of adult learners who struggle for a more democratic adult education, one in which participants can have a say in the schools they attend and in the educational programs targeted to them. The experiences gathered in the different associations that compose CONFAPEA have demonstrated that the participation in

dialogic spaces leads people to change their social and educational horizons and to increase their participation in their learning center, in the community, etc. An example of participatory democracy is the success demonstrated by the Literacy Learners Conferences (CONFAPEA, 2004). These conferences are dialogic spaces for critical reflection that help adult learners break free from social stereotypes and foster their later involvement in public dialogs. Participants in adult basic education speak up about their own interests, needs, and rights and promote solidarity with other human beings who have also been silenced. The Literacy Learners Conference, in contrast to the traditional conferences, involves and empowers the learners by organizing, leading, attending, and actively participating in the event. This kind of conference not only promotes the transformation of traditional educational practices in which the educators teach the learners but also that both learn in cooperation. Educators, practitioners, and representatives of the public administration attend the conference to learn from the learners' contributions. They take part in the process by giving support to the learners and not replacing their voices. There are several committees set up for the event that arrange the contents, location of the conference, reception, registration, protocol, group discussion, and media. Throughout the consensus process the learners define the agenda of the conference with presentations, discussion groups, and experiences. This experience was spread to a European level from the "Trobada project" (FACEPA, 2002) holding five conferences in the same year in Germany, Spain, France, Hungary, and Italy.

*"...Because we haven't had access to education, we have been widely excluded from those places where our voice can be listened to in order to decide what and how we want to learn."* (Participant in the Literacy Learners Conference)

Another example of participatory democracy is the Dialogic Literary Circles (Soler-Gallart, 2001). It is a reading program that promotes both personal and contextual transformation. By means of social participation the dialogic literary circles not only promote literacy skills to the participants but also self-confidence and social inclusion. Through this experience, adults who have never read a book come to read, discuss, and enjoy classic books by authors such as Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Émile Zola, and Federico García Lorca.

*When a person expresses himself and explains the feelings that a book has brought him to say, think, and feel, this really moves me. In the literary circle I learn much more than in the books themselves . . . I learn from the people, and I know I have also contributed, like everybody else.* (Participant of a Dialogic Literary Circle)

Therefore examples such as those quoted above illustrate how people in the above situations of exclusion start to participate in order to actually become active members in their local agencies, in the schools of their children, promoting dialog and solidarity, and causing great impact in their families and communities.

The following example is an experience of participation of immigrant people in adult education centers as a way of promoting social inclusion and overcoming racism. This experience reflects processes of participation through a social model of adult education and presents key elements such as democracy, social justice, and citizenship (Sordé-Martí & Tellado, 2004). As recently as 2000, there started an experience in Spain that now has spread to other European countries. The participants' associations, and specifically the immigrants, have set up an activity called the Multicultural Group responding to this new goal. In this way, the multicultural group was created with the aim



of sending the voices of the immigrants themselves or other cultures to the public debate of the intercultural education, as well as being a place where people from different cultures could show their demands and concerns about adult education.

Moreover, in the Multicultural Groups the relationship between educators/facilitators and participants or between cultures and groups are in an equal dialog among all parts, fostering the idea of a Democratic Adult Education (DAE) and following the principles of dialogic learning (Flecha, 1997). That is, through this process they are creating transformation not only at an individual level but also in the whole community who participate in these educative processes.

### **Dialogic Approaches**

Over the last decades a new line of managing adult education centers has developed in Spain, based in the egalitarian participation of all the people participating in the center. The center of reference promoting this approach is the school of adult education La Verneda – Sant Martí, in Barcelona. This center was created in 1978 as the result of the claims and demands of the neighbors of the area of Sant Martí in Barcelona. The neighbors started to meet in front of the doors of a public building that for years had been deserted to attend classes in the street. The claims of these people managed to persuade the authorities, who recognized their right to an education of quality.

The roots of the movement that started in that school had its origins in the popular tradition of adult education in Spain. There are a lot of commonalities in the gatherings, literary circles, and meetings of the neighbors in the houses of the villages who started

adult education in Spain and the initiative that started from the neighborhood of Verneda and Sant Martí in 1978. But also this new initiative gets energy by a rigorous dialog with the international scientific community, which gives it a unique character. Educators and thinkers, such as Paulo Freire or Jürgen Habermas, knew about this experience and shared dialogs with the participants, exchanging experiences and points of view from an egalitarian position. The conceptualization of dialogic management comes from an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, including Freire's (1997) dialogic pedagogy, Habermas's (1984) theory of communicative action, and Flecha's (1997) dialogic learning. All of them recognize the significance of learners' participation and the possibility of change in society.

The learners participating in the school started to put the basis for a model of management that they called dialogic because it is through egalitarian dialog that they organize and manage everything in the school and its functioning. Consequently, this approach not only gathers the humanistic approximation of the social model of adult education (Medina, 1997), but it goes further, by suggesting a way of organizing in which everybody participates directly, by means of democratic spaces open to everybody's participation, without representative agents, and that works on the principle of egalitarian dialog. Years later, authors such as Elster (1998) presented the idea of deliberative democracy, something that this school was practicing since 1978.

One of the most important bases of this dialogic approach is the dialogic pedagogy of Freire. The Brazilian educator dedicated his life to fight for a pedagogy of freedom, and was critical of the banking positions of education. He proposed an education in which the protagonists are the participants (learners, in his words), not the

teachers or educators. He believed in an education created around the dialog among all the involved people in the class (teacher and learners). Freire's approach is an approach totally based in the praxis, in the daily life, in that space where people put into practice critical and transformative theories. The critical and the concientization ideas of Freire made a deep impression in the concept of the dialogic approach developed by the participants, even though this idea is not the only contribution to the concept. The theory of the communicative action of Habermas (1984) also represents a fundamental contribution to the theoretical reflection in the educational praxis. Habermas (1984) suggests a new framework to analyze social action that fully overcomes the determinism suggested by the classic theories based on Weber's theory of action. Next to the instrumental actions, Habermas opens another space by the name of "communicative action." For that reason, he did an in-depth revision of the concept of rationality, based in the understanding and the achievement of agreements (consensus). This new approach allowed him to critically review the prior social theory and open the possibility to a new space of social action, centered in the intersubjective interactions of the individuals, with the aim to achieve agreements and understandings. Therefore, Habermas (1984) set the theoretical basis to understand the daily life of the people not only when we act in situations of power relations (as we strategically guide our actions), but also other spaces in which the relations are communicative and the purpose of our actions is to reach common understanding and achieve consensus about the things around us and how they work. This point of view deeply relates to how a project is organized and how the decisions are taken in the centers of adult education, from a dialogic approach. The aim, then, is to include all the voices in a dialog that does not seek protagonism of one people

over the other (on the basis of the power position within the structure or the system, for example) but in the understanding about common principles that create opportunities of participation and learning for everybody.

Those are two of the most important contributions. But maybe the main idea of the dialogic approach is the dialogic learning suggested by Flecha (1997). From his point of view, what is important is to create spaces of dialog in which egalitarian dialog is feasible. For that reason it is important to acknowledge that every person has the capacity to contribute to dialogs; that is, that everybody is a subject of speech and action, in the words of Habermas (1984). Dialogic learning is based in seven key principles. First, the idea of egalitarian dialog: all individuals have to have the same opportunity to contribute with their own point of view, each one different, based in their own life and cultural experiences. In addition, the education should respond to a principle of transformation; that is, it should be a tool for the person to overcome situations of exclusion and be able to face new challenges. The transformation also makes reference to the changes that the individual feels when learning new knowledge that allows him or her to be more autonomous; for example, this is the case of a person who learns to read and write and the need for help diminishes when living in literate spaces such as the supermarket, where all the aisles have the names of the products. Learning is also a process of meaning creation. This is another of the principles of dialogic learning. It means that learning becomes an activity full of meaning for the person and it is through that meaning-making that (at least in adult education) people learn. When the individual understands the concept, that moment is when learning occurs. Another element is solidarity. Learning is always a solidarity process in which people share points of view, ways of doing, explanations, and

knowledge; that is how people learn from the others, because knowledge is collective and shared. Another principle of the dialogic learning is equality of differences. That means that all the individuals have the same opportunities for learning, that it is not so important their prior training or how they have acquired the knowledge. The important part is to achieve the knowledge of the ideas being studied, but each person will do it from their own position. Some will have more facility to connect the ideas being learned to their experience in their daily lives, while others will prefer a more scholarly and academic approach. All the approaches (if those achieve learning) are valid, and of all the different ways to solve a situation the richest is the classroom interactions. This principle is connected to the principle of cultural intelligence, that is to say that all individuals have intelligence. To say that intelligence is characteristic of a particular approach is wrong. On the contrary, knowledge takes many forms, and in every culture can be different, but equally valid if those point to achieving knowledge on a subject matter. The last of the principles of the dialogic learning is the instrumental dimension of learning. Dialog does not substitute the contents that have to be learned. The dialogic learning puts in common different ways to acquire those knowledges, but all the individuals should have the same opportunity to learn them and to acquire them in all their forms (both in academically and non academic ways). For example, learning to read and write can be both a scholarly process, in which people repeat a series of graphs and handwriting in their notebooks until this person recognizes and gives (creates) meaning for those symbols in front of him or her, or it can also be a dialogic process in which the person starts with words that have some meaning for him or her and from there starts generating other words from the same family (method of generative words by Paulo Freire). The same happens with

mathematics: a person could solve a problem applying the corresponding algorithm, or he or she could reason on the basis of his or her experience and solve it in another way. In the end everybody should be able to use both approaches.

Consequently, this dialogic approach is characterized by being an approach that arises from the dialog between participants and educators or researchers in several areas of social sciences. The idea of equality is a basic concept in this context that belongs both to the traditional popular adult education concept as well as to authors such as Freire, Habermas, and Flecha, among others. In fact, there is a democratic tradition in this educational and management approach. Dewey (1916), for example, elucidates that “in order to have a large number of values in common, all the members of the group must have an equal opportunity to receive and to take from others. There must be a large variety of shared undertaking and experiences” (p. 84). And those are the kinds of ideas present in this approach. Dewey’s vision of education connected to democracy argues a democratic society with high value to the relationship between individuals. He (1916) states,

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own. (p. 87)

Dewey’s vision of democracy challenges citizens to participate in spaces of decision making. In fact, this author states that the more voices participating in the spaces of decision making, the more possibilities of finding the best solution for the group.

The proposal of the dialogic learning (Flecha, 1997) and the theoretical contributions from centers such as CREA (Center of Research in Theories and Practices

that Overcome Inequalities) at the University of Barcelona, as well as experiences like the school of adult education La Verneda – Sant Martí, offer the basic tools to promote the possibility of a dialogic management, and constitute the theoretical framework for the dissertation that I present in these pages.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to present how dialogic management works and the perception of learners' participation in the spaces of decision making in adult education. For that purpose I conducted a case study in an urban school for adults in Barcelona, Spain. Case study is a methodology technique that allows centering the attention on the detailed analysis of examples that can be considered relevant because of their significance. Stake (2005) and Creswell (1998, 2003) stated that case studies are the exploration or processes of activities and events with clear boundaries. In this case, this technique has allowed me to center my attention on the in-depth analysis of my object of study (dialogic management) in a center of adult education internationally acknowledged because of its application of a dialogic learning approach (Sánchez, 1999).

I conducted a qualitative study. This qualitative case study analyzes adult learners' involvement in the management of the learning center, by using qualitative methods, taking into account possible ethical dilemmas, and also including the research participants in the process.

The overall research approach that I have employed for this study is the critical communicative approach. Critical communicative approach refers to the research, which promotes and takes into account the centrality of dialog and participation in the construction of knowledge, and does not prioritize the accumulation of information, but



its use and results. This approach allowed me to give protagonism to the learners and include their voices through this study as the main source of information.

In the following sections first I present the research questions. Then I justify why I have selected the methodology employed for the study on dialogic management in a center of adult education. I present the main arguments of the methodological approach of this study, the critical communicative methodology. Then, I present a descriptive explanation of the case study that I conducted. Finally, for the final section I discuss the trustworthiness of the results obtained.

### **Research Questions**

Numerous scholars and practitioners recognize the centrality of participation in adult education and this is a topic that has promoted abundant research. The participation of the adult learners studied often has to do with how they feel they are treated, and with which kind of opportunities and spaces of participation they find in the center for adult education. This topic is an outstanding aspect, mainly within the factor that lifelong learning is one of the ever-present elements in the educational agendas of countries and international organizations such as the European Union, UNESCO, etc. Research carried out over the last decades assures that education is a key element for being included in the present information society. Therefore my interest in conducting a dissertation like this resided in exploring which elements of management in an educational center affected or did not affect the perception of adults in their continuous education and their participation of the center for adult learning. Given that an extended study of the different models of management overcomes the possibilities of this doctoral dissertation, I centered the study

in the model of dialogic management, and I analyzed how learners perceive this model, how it works, and which responses offer to promote a participatory, inclusive, and democratic education for all.

There is a great deal of research on the participation of parents, families, principals, and educators in the management of educational centers, mainly schools for children (Jones, 1998; Serico, 1998). There is also a wide range of literature on adult learning and participation in the management of the workplace (Alavi & Tiwana, 2005; Argyris & Schön, 1978/1996; Cyert & March, 1963; Jude, 2003; Nevis et al., 1995; Nicolini & Mezner, 1995; Pedler & Aspinwall, 1998; Senge, 1990; Senge et al., 1999). The study of management participation in educational centers is a key element for the well functioning of the center, meaning that an adequate management can serve, in this case, to make adult education more democratic and make it available to more people, making adult education a more inclusive and serving society better to overcome inequality educational situations that may exist.

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What occurs in the dialogic management of the learning center?
  - How do adult learners interact among themselves and with the workers of the center?
  - How do adult learners interact with the community?
  - What do adult learners perceive the dialogic management promotes?
2. How do adult learners perceive their participation in the dialogic management?
  - What are the different reasons why people participate in the management of the center?

- How do participants perceive their involvement process?

3. What does being involved in the community mean for adult learners in the center?

- How do participants understand participation and learning?

- How do participants perceive themselves and others in relation to participation?

### **Justification of the Methodology Selected**

The study here presented is a qualitative study. The reason why I decided to use a methodological approach solely qualitative was my interest in doing this research to understand how adult learners perceive their participation in a center for adults that is managed in a dialogical approach. A quantitative approach would have provided a descriptive picture of this reality, but my interest in doing this dissertation was to gather the voices of the participant individuals, who are the real protagonists, to explain from their own personal experiences and their own practices how they perceive and how they understand their participation in a management model such as the one presented in this study. Therefore, a qualitative approach offered me an ideal frame to approach the participants and gather their testimony about dialogic management.

There are several management models of adult education centers (Sanz, 2006). My interest is to analyze what happens when a dialogic model of management is used to manage an adult education center. For that reason, I conducted a case study in a school of Barcelona that follows this organizational model. The school selected for the study, the “School of La Verneda – Sant Martí,” has been widely recognized by the international

scientific community (Sánchez, 1999) and that took part in the origins of the learning communities (Elboj, Puigdemívol, Soler & Valls, 2002), one of the most successful educational experiences in Spain in recent years.

On the other hand, my purpose with this study was to create a space in which both the voices of the adult learners attending the school as well as the voices of educators that work in this field could be heard because these people are the real protagonists of adult education. For that reason I decided to locate my study in the frame of the critical communicative methodology (Flecha & Gómez, 2004; Gómez, Latorre, Sánchez & Flecha, 2006). This methodological approach comes from the critical revision of prior research paradigms such as the quantitative, the constructivist, and the socio-critical methodology, and especially highlights the idea that social reality (what really interests us to study) is a reality of communicative nature. That means that it is a human construction by which meanings are created through dialog that people hold to give meaning to things and processes around us. This approach takes especial care to include the voices of all the participants (in one way or another) in the topic of study. This is what motivated me to select this methodological approach in conducting a case study under the parameters of critical communicative methodology.

The choice of a communicative case study as a methodological approach allowed me to center in depth in the analysis of this school using several techniques (in-depth communicative interviews, communicative focus groups, and communicative observations) obtaining a detailed understanding of the reality studied. On the one hand, obtaining data from different proceedings allowed me to contrast and compare information during the analysis through triangulation of the different sources used. On

the other hand, the use of the case study as a framework first for the data collection and later for the analysis helped to coherently organize my study consistently with the research questions proposed.

### Methodological approach: the critical communicative methodology

The critical communicative methodology is based on one intersubjective/dialogical epistemological conception. This means that from reality point of view, the phenomena studied in the research are a product of the intersubjective agreements between individuals that use dialog to define the reality around them. In other words, the meaning given to objects/phenomena/processes around us is a meaning that we share because we have talked about it and we have reached agreements. This is not a closed point of view. The meaning of the objects/phenomena/processes that are around us can change. Whenever we talk about them again, if we reach different agreements, held by different arguments, the meaning that we give them will change.

The critical communicative methodology is located in a model of action theory. That means that it is a tool that allows us to explain and understand the actions of the individuals in phenomena and processes that we are researching. When analyzing the reality from this point of view, we see that this methodology incorporates contributions made by researchers such as Chomsky (1988), Searle (2001), Mead (1934), Habermas (1987), and Beck (1999). Those contributions gather several postulates that the critical communicative perspective assumes (Gómez, Latorre, Sánchez, Flecha, 2006).

*Postulate 1: Universality of language and action:* Language and action are universal abilities common to all people, because of the fact of being human beings. All

people have the ability of language and doing actions (Cole & Scribner, 1977; Habermas, 1987; Luria, 1987). For that reason, from the methodological point of view, we have to advocate for the methods that gather and make all the voices of the participant people worthy in the reality that is being studied.

*Postulate 2: Individuals as transformational social agents:* Everybody is capable of interpreting the world around us and acting upon it. That is, individuals are not “objects” subordinated to the structures that create dynamics that drag us. People have the option to rebel against power relationships, make our own decisions, and guide our actions in consequence. Therefore, from the standpoint of the critical communicative methodology the techniques employed allow space for individuals to freely express their agency.

*Postulate 3: Communicative rationality:* The individuals that work under the umbrella of the critical communicative methodology assume that the communicative rationality, as Habermas (1987) defines it, is the universal basis of the language and action competency that all people have. The communicative rationality implies that individuals act not only for their own interests (instrumental rationality), but also to reach agreements. For that reason, from the standpoint of this methodological approach we look for techniques that allow the guarantee of the analysis of situations on the basis of this postulate.

*Postulate 4: Common sense:* Given the fact that in education, as well as in social sciences, we study phenomena and processes in which there are people involved, we have to bear in mind that everyone interprets reality on the basis of their common sense, that is, to those beliefs and knowledge that they have lifelong internalized and that they use to

interpret all around them (Schütz, 1993). The individuals that use the methodology of the critical communicative approach look for techniques and ways to organize the research in a way that allows us to get to the common sense of the individuals involved in the research.

*Postulate 5: No interpretative hierarchy:* The individuals that work with the critical communicative approach assume that the interpretations that the participants of the research do have the same values as those of the researchers. Given the fact that the participants in the phenomena or process that we are researching are the ones that have the knowledge and experience of that reality, and given the fact that we assume that all individuals have the ability of language and action, and that we are able to know our world, the researchers that work under this approach assume that there should not be an interpretative hierarchy. With the techniques that we employ we ensure that all the interpretations (all the voices) of the people involved in the research are included.

*Postulate 6: Same epistemological level:* As a direct consequence of the prior postulate, we assume that there is no epistemological unevenness between the researcher and the researched. All the individuals involved in the research have the same ability to know the phenomena or researched process. Then, there is a need to look for the best way in which everybody can contribute with their point of view and their interpretations. Through the creation of spaces of dialog in which all the participants of the research have the same opportunities to contribute with their respective knowledge, then eliminating a great part of the epistemological unevenness is possible. The researchers provide the knowledge of the scientific community while the participants of the research provide their knowledge and experience of the reality which is being investigated by all.

*Postulate 7: Dialogic knowledge:* The individuals that we place with ourselves in the critical communicative perspective assume that knowledge is a dialogic process. It is neither an objective process of searching for knowledge (positivist perspective), nor the result of the subjective interpretations of the researchers (interpretative perspective). The knowledge is the result of the process in which we all participate. By means of dialog we share interpretations, points of view, arguments, that facilitate our conception of reality. It is an intersubjective process of knowledge creation.

The critical communicative approach has its origins in the critical revision of prior interpretative paradigms (see Table).

The main contribution of this methodological approach to educational and social research is the critical revision of prior methodologies in a humanistic way. In the critical communicative approach the individuals regain the spotlight in the process of study, and their opinions, points of view, reflections, and analysis are taken into account in equality with the ones from the people conducting the research. The attention posed in dialog, and the ways of communication between the individuals involved in the topic being studied, is a way to overcome the classical controversy about objectivity/subjectivity of social sciences. Including all the points of view is a way to take into account the subjectivities (all the sensibilities), and therefore, is a way to offer a more objective analysis (complete) possible of what is happening in reality. This methodological approach allows including all the participants in an equal level, highlighting their knowledge of the situation being studied.



**Table 1: Basic dimensions of the theoretical conceptions**

CONCEPTIONS DIMENSIONS	Objectivist	Constructivist	Socio- Critical	Critical-Communicative
Ontological	Reality is objective, independent from the individual who knows it and acts in it.	Reality is a social construction that depends on the meanings that people attribute to things. Constructionism includes the collective generation and transmission of meaning.	Reality is seized and constituted by historically situated structures, and made up of social, cultural, economic, ethnic aspects, etc.	Social reality is a human construction in which meanings are constructed communicatively through interaction among people
Epistemological	Objectivist. Scientific statements are based on objective realities.	Constructivist. Scientific statements are a social construction.	Dialectic. Scientific statements are the result of dialectics.	Dialogic. Scientific statements are the result of dialog.
Methodological	Quantitative: Experimentation, observation.	Qualitative: Interpretation, hermeneutics.	Socio-critical: Dialectic, praxeology.	Communicative-Critical: Dialog.
Modalities of research	Experimental (unifactorial and multifactorial) Quasi-experimental (non equivalent groups, temporary series and unique subjects) Ex post-facto (descriptive, of development, comparative-casual and correlational).	Ethnography Phenomenology / Phenomenography Ethnomethodology Narrative-biographic Theory based in case studies	Action Research: critical, participatory, and collaborative. Evaluative – participatory research.	Critical communicative research.

Source: Gómez, Latorre, Sánchez, Flecha (2006), page 35.

It also offers a vision that includes the classic elements of socio-critical research such as the structures, but from a totally different approach: the structures (social class, ethnicity, gender) are not presented as dehumanized variables, separate from individuals. On the contrary, this approach offers a vision of social reality made by people, who come from different social stratus, different cultures, with prior histories and different experiences that all together participate in the interactions that give place to the reality of

study. Therefore I think that this is an appropriate approach to understand in depth and the most rigorously possible to ascertain which kind of interactions happen in the school that I have selected to conduct a communicative case study, and how, through communicative comprehension (that is, shared with all the participant subjects) of this reality it is possible to arrive at valid conclusions to guide good management practices in the management of adult education centers in order to be more inclusive and useful to overcome situations of educational and social inequalities.

### **Case Study: The School of La Verneda – Sant Martí**

The study I have conducted for this dissertation is a case study of an adult education school “la Verneda – Sant Martí.” This school is located in a working-class neighborhood in the city of Barcelona (Spain). It is a center that has played a part in the transformation that took place in adult education in the country since the end of the 70s, and has demonstrated that learning is not limited to childhood and adolescence. It is a grassroots school deeply connected to the community. With an attendance of more than 1600 people, this center is located on the fifth floor of a building that houses several services for the community, such as a library, a kindergarten, a day center for the elderly, etc. The school is present in the social movements of the neighborhood, participates in parties and popular celebrations, and promotes cultural activities such as literary gatherings; there are even activities in the street, open to the participation of everybody in the neighborhood. In this school has been always present the idea that the learners are people who should decide about education and how they want it. Therefore, this school is managed and directed by the adult learners without intermediaries. They are organized in

two associations (Agora and Heura), responsible for organizing the school, deciding how to use the resources and deciding which kind of education is offered, as well as conveying the voices of these 1600 people to the suitable educational administrations to also obtain financial support for the maintenance of all the activities and education offered. On the other hand, the activities of the school function with the participation of almost one hundred volunteers, former students of the school, teachers and university faculty and, any other person who desires to share their knowledge on a particular area (such as reading, mathematics, history, literature, etc). The school is organized with open meetings for everybody's participation. The team that works every day in the school meets once a week in the Weekly Commission (COSE) which is open to all, and once a month all the participants of the school can take part in the Monthly Commission (COME), in which decisions affecting the functioning of the entire school are made. In addition, there is also the Planning Commission of activities, in which learners meet and organize specific cultural and educational activities to carry out. Once a year there is a free-of-charge outing in which everybody (learners, volunteers and educators) works together during the weekend on specific topics regarding the functioning of the center. This direct implication of the learners in the management of the school, through egalitarian dialog, is an innovative contribution that this center makes to adult education.

#### A brief history of the La Verneda – Sant Martí Adult School

The school of adult education “La Verneda – Sant Martí” has its origins in 1978 from the demands of a group of neighbors of this district in Barcelona. The building in which the school is actually located was at the moment property of Franco's government,

and for years had been empty and with no use. Then, several neighbors of the area got together to claim the building in order to have services for the community, such as an infirmary, a kindergarten, a library, and a center for adult education. After occupying the building and locking themselves in as a measure of pressure, and doing classes in the street in front of the building to claim the need of a space, the neighbors of the area finally achieved their purpose and succeeded in having the building destined to cover the needs of the community. This is how the school of adult education “la Verneda – Sant Martí” was born. From then on the neighborhood has always had a school of adult education totally free of charge.

Slowly the neighbors of the area started to obtain more resources and the following year they already had a staff of three teachers officially hired by the corresponding educational administration. In 1980 the council of the school approved the rules of internal regulation of the school, in which the principles of the project were defined and still prevail today: *“an organization that always has to be at the service of the necessities of the people and the neighborhood, the equality in the decision making with all the people implicated and with a relationship between the project and the neighborhood”* (Verneda-Sant Martí, 2007). That year there were 400 people registered in the school, in one of the four different shifts of classes offered. In the following years, the number of registrations continued growing and the news about the existence of the center started spreading in the area. The school started to occupy a place of reference in the community. In 1983 the current organizational model was adopted (COSE and COME), and the school started to receive visits from people interested in learning about

the dialogic management model being developed by the learners participating daily, based in a coherent synthesis between educational theory and daily educational practices.

Other initiatives started to gain interest; in 1985 teachers of the school, with the presence at the university, started claiming the need to create a space at the university for Adult Education. AEPA (Association for the Permanent Education of Adults) was created and the school continued growing (Flecha, Lopez and Saco, 1988). The following year another achievement took place; this time the school was awarded the right to do vocational training with courses developed by the Generalitat in Catalonia (the regional government body). However, the great event of the year was the creation of Agora and Heura, the two associations of learners participating in the school (students and former students) that started to directly manage all the fields of the adult school of La Verneda – Sant Martí. This was a way to “*insure that the School for Adults La Verneda Sant Marti was a project of the people and for the people and that it always answers to the interests, necessities and dreams of the people that had suffered the social exclusion and not to the interests and necessities of the professionals of education*” (Verneda-Sant Marti, 2007).

In the following years the school grew to become a successful point of reference of the people and for the people of the Verneda and Sant Marti neighborhoods. Many events took place, always conducted and directed by the participants themselves. Conferences, participation in social movements, organization of cultural events, such as a cycle of conferences with relevant authors from the Spanish and Catalan literature, stressed the sort of activities developed by the participants through the school. Every time more people registered and new time frames were opened, until now there are classes and activities nonstop from 9:30am to 10:00pm and it also is open over the weekends. In

1996 FACEPA (Federation of Cultural and Educational Associations for Adults) was created and the school of “la Verneda-Sant Martí” took a central role in this movement.

Over the last years, the school of adult education La Verneda – Sant Martí has become a center of reference for its democratic participation and dialogic management. The adult learners have actively participated in social and academic movements of adult education and, have established international links with organizations of other European countries (through projects such as the cybernetic gatherings, or the creation of a virtual campus, for example), as well as with other areas of the world, like Brazil, with which the associations established a collaboration partnership with Porto Alegre<sup>1</sup>. The experience of La Verneda– Sant Martí gave place to publications that have appeared in journals such as Harvard Education Review (Sánchez, 1999). It is through those almost thirty years of history, that the school has never stopped belonging to the participants, the learners, and continues to be an example and model of dreams, enchantment, and vindication.

#### Participants of the study

For this research the relevant and main stakeholder group was the learners in adult education of the above-mentioned adult school. Secondary stakeholders were educators and volunteers of the learning community. I selected this case in consultation with FACEPA, the federation of participants’ associations. Among all the participants in the

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<sup>1</sup> Porto Alegre is a city in Brazil well known by its participatory and democratic experiences. For instance, the participatory budget is an experience that takes place in Porto Alegre and about eighty-five other Brazilian cities; where a portion of the budget is set to be allocated in the demands of the citizens after a democratic process of decision among the parts. Besides the World Social Forum is another example; in this case, the forum held in Porto Alegre in 2003 welcomed over 100.000 people from 156 countries and demonstrated that participative democratic processes of organization regarding common themes are attainable in a global scale.

center La Verneda – Sant Martí, 14 learners and 4 educators were chosen to be interviewed and 2 focus groups were conducted as well as observations were done for group meetings and document analysis of learners' evaluations and projects. Only those participants who agreed to participate and signed a consent letter were interviewed. Learners were chosen because they had different levels of involvement in the school management. All of them had participated more or less in management activities and some had a lot of experience in participating in the school management and others were just starting. In addition, all the interviewees have had different prior experiences with regard to formal schooling. Some participants had less than 4 years of formal school as children, others completed High School more than 40 years ago, and others are currently school dropouts that are returning to school to complete their basic education. The school's students are intergenerational and multicultural; therefore the interviewees were men and women from a wide range of ages, from 19 to 70, and from different cultural backgrounds. The majority were employed and a few were retired.

The educators chosen to participate in this study were all women and they were selected because of their involvement and experience in the school. Two educators had 20 years or more of experience, one had 7 years of experience and the fourth had 2 years of experience. The most experienced educators hold a contract with the administration to teach classes towards official qualifications such as GES (equivalent to GED); the educator with 7 years of experience holds a contract with one of the participants' associations and she is mainly hired to fulfill the tasks required by the European projects that the association coordinates. The educator with 2 years of experience is a volunteer and teaches basic adult education.

The learners' focus group was selected because it was a group with extremely different experiences in the management of the center. Some had attended and participated intensely in the organization and others were new to the school and did not have the opportunity yet to participate in the management of the center. The educators' focus group was the Weekly Commission, which is composed mainly of the individuals who are hired by the correspondent administration to teach required classes for the official qualifications and of educators hired by the associations of the center, although this Commission is open to everybody. This group was selected because it is the group of educators with longer hours in contact with learners and is highly involved in promoting dialogic management in the center.

### **Data Collection**

In order to respond to the research questions proposed by this study I have used different methods of data collection (interviews, focus groups and participatory observation in the classroom). All the techniques were applied from a communicative point of view, in agreement with the methodological approach that I chose to frame my work, for the reasons previously stated. There is a list of questions enclosed in the appendix gathering the discussion topics and the "starter" questions for each topic (See APPENDIX A).

### **Communicative focus groups**

I conducted 2 focus groups, one with participants and the other with educators and volunteers. The focus group discussion helped to understand the management



participation from a learners' and educators' point of view, as well as the relationships inside the groups.

Among diverse focus groups techniques, I followed the principles of the “communicative gathering,” a variety of focus group that includes dialogic methodological aspects (CREA, 1996, 2000b). The communicative focus group is different from the traditional focus group in purpose and selection of the group components. The objective of a communicative gathering is not to study how people interact or their behavior; instead, it is to open a forum for discussion and reflection that generates wider, more accurate interpretation through cooperative interpretations. The communicative focus group is composed of a natural group in which the participants know each other and they are in their regular meeting place (in this case a classroom/meeting room), participants agree to take part in the discussion, it is a space for egalitarian communication, and there is a collective interpretation of reality. The researcher is just another person in the discussion group because the interpretations are established and agreed by the whole group, so that everyone in the gathering became researchers and actors (in the framework of communicative critical methodology).

#### Communicative in-depth interviews

I interviewed 4 educators, two interviews of senior educators (20 and 24 years of practice at the center), and another of a junior educator (7 years of experiences) and the fourth of a novice educator with 2 years of experience at the center. These interviews helped me to understand the educator-learner relationship from the point of view of the educators, and to learn about the organization and functioning of dialogic management of

the center from their point of view. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on the organization and dynamics as well as the educators' perceptions of the dialogic management of the center. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed.

I also conducted 14 in-depth interviews. I interviewed participants with different backgrounds and with different years of experience participating at the center. Those in-depth interviews helped me to understand what is occurring in the dialogic management and how adult learners perceive their participation. The questions focused on the participants' experiences, which help to capture the meaning of being involved in the community and the management of the center. These interviews were communicative in-depth interviews because through dialog researcher and researched reached agreements on their interpretations.

#### Communicative observations

The observation helped to capture "what is occurring" in the center, meetings, or interactions at the learning center. The observation enabled me to draw inferences and watch tacit understanding of theory-in-use, as well as aspects of the participants' perspective that they did not state directly in interviews (Maxwell, 1996). I conducted observations at the center during three weeks, attending meetings, classes, and activities in each of the three time periods of the center. I took field notes writing down participants' contributions, comments, or actions that occurred during the sessions and that appear to be relevant to the study, and through dialog with the participants agreed on interpretations of the interactions and actions observed.

### **Data Analysis**

There are different approaches to analyze the data of a qualitative study. Glaser and Strauss (1967) present a method known as Grounded Theory, in which the researchers categorize the data collected, they create theories that appear from the prior analysis, and they modify them when they obtain new data until the analysis does not provide new information changing the defined categories. Other authors prefer a more interpretative approach (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), regarding the initial research questions. In my study, I used the critical communicative approach, which is characterized by a communicative process of interpretation of the information in which the researchers participated as well as the person being researched, and also grounded theory as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This way, we broke both the principle of interpretative hierarchy (the distance between researcher and researched) and the knowledge and interpretations of the participants of the research are legitimized, which are equally valid due to the deep knowledge of the reality being studied. Once the information was collected, I transcribed the recordings. Data were collected in two languages, Catalan and Spanish. The transcription was done in each language as well as the analysis. Data were initially collected in May 2006 for two weeks, and after transcribing the recorded interviews and groups in November 2006 I met again with the participants of the study and together discussed the interpretation of the data, building together the analysis for the study. To analyze the information gathered I used the MAXQDA2 software program. This software program provided an organized storage file system. Reading line for line of the data collected I coded in categories sentences and paragraphs of the data-collected transcripts. Bogan and Knopp Biklen (2003) explain

that “codes categorize information at different levels. Major codes are more general and sweeping, incorporating a wide range of activities, attitudes, and behaviors. Subcodes break these major codes into smaller categories” (p. 174). The software program was useful to store, organize, categorize, and search themes of the data collected. After coding all the data, I was able to do different searches with the computer program. I retrieved data for all the participants’ files for the first category, and repeated the action for the second category and so forth. The same action was done for the educators’ files. The computer software for qualitative data analysis also enabled me to do searches on specific themes. Therefore I was able to visualize in a few simple steps all the coded segments under a specific category or subcategory. After reading through all the segments I selected the paragraphs and sentences that would better explain the emerging themes from the statements of learners and educators. During the second phase (November 2006) of data collection I discussed with the participants about the categories and reached consensus with them. Later during the report of the results, the quotes and excerpts selected were translated. In the analysis process I also took into account the critical communicative approach; for that reason in my analysis I identified two dimensions (exclusory and transformative), that helped me to organize and to better understand the testimonies of the people who participated in the study.

### **Trustworthiness and Validity**

The critical communicative approach opens new perspectives for educational research, since it overcomes the eternal dichotomy between researcher-subject and researched-object. It is possible thanks to the fact that the researcher leaves his or her

position of power and becomes well disposed to accept the best arguments. This way, communicative techniques are based on the creation of a favorable context for communication and understanding.

The communicative paradigm solves this problem by considering that meanings are built communicatively through dialog and interaction among people. This conception is based on the Theory of the Communicative Action developed by Habermas (1984-1987), who considers the concept of *communicative rationality* as the way to analyze social behavior. This concept implies an intersubjective dialog between people who participate in the research and demonstrate their reflections, motivations, and interpretations, attaining a symmetrical relationship. The result of this process allows an analysis where both researchers and researched are active subjects and participants in the research and construction of the investigation. According to this paradigm, the parties who participate in educational research do not only do it through dialog with each other, but meaning is constructed through the contributions of the researchers and the researched. Therefore, objectivity in research is created through intersubjective dialog, which supposes that there is not an expert figure, because the researcher becomes another participant in the process of understanding, whose objective is the transformation of reality.

Within the critical communicative approach, data collection does not finish when dialog expires, but they always carry on with a second meeting. As researchers have already done the literal transcriptions of former dialogs and have analyzed them, their work is put into question through a debate with all participants involved. Here lays the

basis for the joint interpretation of reality that characterizes communicative research, thus avoiding the partial and possibly interested interpretations of researchers.

Using a framework of analysis like the critical communicative approach has been a means to ensure trustworthiness in the interpretations that I present in the following chapters of this dissertation. The participation of the learners in the triangulation of the collected data with the interviews, focus groups, and observations allowed me to guarantee that it is their voices (and not my sole interpretation of their voices) that appears on these pages, and it is the best guarantee that my prior ideas or prejudices (as a researcher) do not bias the interpretations that appear in the following chapters. Finally, this is a methodology to ensure that those interpretations correspond to the real situation that I tried to explain with this study.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

This chapter will review the opinions and points of view of the learners and educators that participated in the study conducted in the school Verneda – Sant Martí. Their testimony offered the evidence that facilitated the discussion of the three initial research questions that I presented for this research. The data are organized in two sections. On the one hand, I center my attention on the analysis of the voices of the participants. For that reason, I use in this chapter direct quotes of their comments in the interviews that I conducted for the fieldwork in order to illustrate the analysis and the discussion of the results from their point of view. On the other hand, I do the same with the testimonies of the educators of the center that participated in the research. In both sections I organize the discussion of the data under the three initial research questions for my dissertation presented in the chapter on methodology. The data are discussed from a critical communicative perspective. Table 5 gathers all the codes and number of segments coded for each category (See APPENDIX B).

### **Data analysis from the participants' point of view**

In order to analyze the information collected through the communicative in-depth interviews, the communicative discussion groups, and the communicative observations, I have used an approach based in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This inductive approximation to the data has allowed me to establish a dialog with the people involved in the study from the beginning of the analysis phase, as I was checking the emerging

themes from the testimonies of the learners. Then, in this process of analysis I gave names to a series of categories that I later discussed with the participants to reach a consensus (just as it is done in the critical communicative methodology). Therefore, several categories appeared such as egalitarian dialog, relationships, dialogic management, time and activity, among others. In table 2 I present the categories that emerged from the data analysis.

The emerging categories were themes that made sense of what the participants of the study said. Soon in the analysis process I could identify core categories and subcategories. The core categories emerged with high frequency of mention. The emerging categories were different and varied; here I define each of the categories found in the analysis.

*History* was an important category in which comments about the school history intertwined with personal histories. Two subcategories were defined: a) recognition gathered data on historical events in which the school was recognized by the community or by institutions; b) immigration and class awareness gathered data on what the participants defined as personal experiences on being immigrants (from other areas of Spain and from other countries) and the connections they made to the concept of class.

*School attraction* collected comments and statements that participants made with regard to what they like about the school. Mainly, it is the information they share with their families and friends about the school.



**Table 2: Analysis of the emerging categories from the participants' discourse**

Categories	Subcategories
History	Recognition Immigration and class awareness
School Attraction	
Time and activity	VERN FACEPA ▫ Congresses Commissions ▫ Porto Alegre Commissions School Associations
Definitions	Dialogic learning ▫ Solidarity ▫ Egalitarian dialog Dialogic management
Management spaces	Organization – functioning Relationship Participation Achievements of management Needs and demands Decision making Participation perception
Social transformation	Self-esteem/Self- confidence Self-awareness
Learning Community	Participation Voluntary work
Learning	Active learning
Citizenship	
Democracy	
Participation	Democratic participation
Governance	
Values	Solidarity Readiness for equity Readiness for innovative practices

*Time and activity* mainly gathered descriptive information about each participant, although in their explanations they expressed their motivations for participating in the spaces of the school with definitions and statements about what they do in each space; those are: VERN, FACEPA (congresses), Commissions (Porto Alegre), and school associations.

*Definitions* collected the descriptions on dialogic learning and dialogic management. The subcategories dialogic learning and dialogic management gathered participants' statements about these concepts from their point of view. The participants made specific definitions of two of the seven principles of the dialogic learning, solidarity and egalitarian dialog, previously presented in Chapter 2.

*Management spaces* gathered comments on what and how those spaces work. The subcategories helped to sort the comments in different themes: organization and functioning of these spaces, relationships within these spaces, participation in the management spaces, and achievements. Other subcategories were the needs and demands that appear in those spaces, the decision making that occurs in those spaces, and the perception of the participation in such spaces.

*Social transformation* gathered explanations of the participants on personal and social transformations they were aware of related to their participation in the school. Two subcategories were defined. On the one hand, self-esteem/self-confidence collected the comments on personal transformations affecting their self-esteem or self-confidence. On the other hand, self-awareness collected the comments of participants on personal transformations expressing changes in how they perceive themselves.

*Learning Community* gathered comments on the activities the participants develop in the center as a learning community. The two subcategories are participation and voluntary work. Comments on how they participate in the learning community were collected under the first subcategory and comments about their voluntary work for the learning community were collected in the second.

*Learning* collected the participants' perceptions on their learning and learning in relation to their participation in the center. The participants used the specific wording of active learning, the subcategory, to describe a specific way of learning and participating in the center.

*Citizenship* gathered comments of the participants' perceptions of citizenship and how they do these activities.

*Democracy* gathered the comments of the participants' perception of democracy and how they explain democratic processes in the center and in the community.

*Participation* was created collecting the comments of the participants about their participation in a very broad sense. Their explanations on participation gathered comments about classroom participation, school participation, and community participation. The democratic participation subcategory was created to collect the comments on this specific way of participating.

*Governance* gathered the comments of participants on the school, local and regional ideas of governance.

*Values* collected the comments of the participants on social and educational principles of participants and educators. There are three subcategories: Solidarity, which gathers comments on solidarity expressed from the participants of the study, readiness for

equity, and readiness for innovative practices both from the participants and educators involved.

Next I will presented the opinions of the learners, from their point of view. I used direct quotes from the fieldwork to illustrate the reflections that the participant people offered about the different elements of the dialogic management that together we identified in the communicative analysis of the data.

### History

Many of the people who attend the school for adults of La Verneda – Sant Martí are people who stopped attending school a long time ago. Some of the participant people never had the opportunity to attend school, due to different reasons.

I: And when did you move to Barcelona, did you come to work...

P4: me? To serve, yes, I was only 15 years old. I wasn't 15 yet and I came to Barcelona to serve, because I was tired of the town.

(Interview with Carmen)

This person's case illustrates usual situations among people who participate in the school of La Verneda – Sant Martí. Many of them are people who moved to Catalonia (and specifically to Barcelona) during the great migrations that took place in Spain during the 60s, when people left their towns to go to the big city centers looking for job opportunities that they could not find in their towns. During those years a process of urban concentration occurred in Spain (Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, Valencia mainly),

while the rural areas were gradually uninhabited. Most of these people were unable to attend or dedicate time to their own education, because they had to focus on finding a job (and usually several jobs, because it was the moment in Spain of having more than one job), in order to support their own families. From a social point of view, the following years (mid 60s) are known in Spain as the decade of the “baby boom.” I mention this topic here to justify that many of the participant people, thirty or thirty-five years ago, did not have time for themselves, but for their families. And now, once they have raised their families is when they start to have more free time and that is one of the reasons that they give to go to the adult school. This situation is visible in many of the comments in the interviews with the participants of the study. Here are some examples.

P5: Yes, yes, in this neighborhood... in Barcelona...

I: and when did you move to this neighborhood?

P5: I came to this area about 20 years ago.

(Interview with Catalina)

P7: Now I am 62, and I came when I was 15

I: did you come to work or with your family?

P7: yes I came with my family, and I started to serve, we didn't have a house at that time, just like now, for example the girls that people hire as domestic service

I: they are from foreign countries

P7: they are from other countries, but they don't sleep there, well some do. Back then, we did stay, it was the only way to have a house and other things. And I served until I got married. I served for almost five years serving...

I: and where did you come from?

P7: I came from Sevilla.

(Interview with Manuela)

I: And let me ask you... have you always lived in Barcelona, did you come from somewhere else? P12: no, not always... I have been living here for 21 or 22 years

I: where did you come from?

P12: from Cordoba

(Interview with Lorenzo)

For these people, to go to school means two things, a personal challenge and the opportunity to make a dream come true. This is the transformative part of their discourse. Nevertheless, I have also found some cases in which learners have exclusionary discourses. Those are not the majority, because these are the people who chose not to go to the adult learning centers. But it is meaningful that individuals like the one in this example that used to have an opposite discourse to the participation in adult education centers change their point of view radically after participating in a school such as La Verneda – Sant Martí. This is a sign of the transformational ability of a model of education based in egalitarian dialog.

P2: Because we are at the end of life, if I have lived 66 years without knowing that, I can live the rest of my life without learning more, I already know my things. We have defense mechanisms that maybe you don't have [meaning the younger people], because we have lived during the war.

(Interview with Lucia)

The same person continues, saying:

P2: Here you come because you want to participate in something that you want, that is learning, the freedom, the learning of reading... the freedom because of different reasons.

Many doors open after that.

(Interview with Lucia)

The first part of the discourse is a usual justification among the people who do not attend adult schools. But this person first stated that it was not necessary for her to learn things that were unknown to her in her life, then (once she has attended the school and had this experience) changes her point of view and highlights the importance to participate in the school, because of the amount of new opportunities that this experience entails and because of the freedom that it involves.

### School Attraction

The main reason participant people state that they like the school is because of its pedagogic orientation and organization. The dialogic learning and the dialogic management are elements that appear in the discourse of the learners interviewed as one of the main elements to justify the appreciation they have for the school. This appreciation, on the other hand, seems related (in terms of the discourse analysis) both to the motivation that learners have to be present in this school, as well as to their participation in it.

I: What do you like of the school, what do you tell people about the school, to your friends, what is the first thing you tell them?

P1: well... that I have a lot of fun here, because when there are outings, I go... or the end of the year event, or cultural activities, I go... and that the learners participate, I mean that we have our voice and our say, that the school is not authoritarian... nobody have to do what someone tells you, you go and see, in the assembly ... Commissions, where you can ask things and things can be approved...

(Interview with Antonia)

In this quote the interviewed person comments about different things related to her participation in the school. But what I want to highlight here, in the analysis, is the importance that all people have a voice and that their voices are heard in this school. This is a reason especially important from the point of view of the motivation that this person feels to participate in the school, and represents an element of the school identity, that makes it different from other adult schools.

P2: No, no, there is people that didn't know... that I didn't know about it, and now I have told a lot of people about what we do... and finding this school is something that I didn't expect, and it fills you, you don't know... I don't know how to define it, because it fills you...it is those things that you feel like home, is something that gets you and calls you...

(Interview with Lucia)

The feeling of belonging sometimes even gets to be shown in the emotional side. This participant, for example, explains how in the school she feels fulfilled. This is a recurring element among many of the people who attend the adult school, because they



are usually people who in the past did not have the opportunity to go to school, or they had to leave soon because of different reasons. In any case, the fact of having another opportunity for education and learning new things, means for them a way of valuing themselves and transforming their personal identity as people who are also able to do things and develop academic activities.

I: Ah...do you think the way this school works changes people? How has it changed you or the people you have talked to?

P6: well, the educators here are really nice, they always help you, you always find something good... that helps a lot for us in school. The people who come in here, doesn't need to find another school, because this one has everything, what do you need? Study, the people is good, in the classroom we are white, black, all races... all cultures and this is very good.

(Interview with Diana)

The result, and the highlight here, is that the participant people do not want to leave the school and they do not want to change it. They do not want to do it, precisely because of how they feel about it: they feel the school is theirs; it is a space in which they can feel fulfilled, express their opinions and, share opinions and learn with the other classmates, as well as the educators.

Motivation sources for attending an adult education school

The people who participated in the study arrived at the school of La Verneda – Sant Martí for different reasons and in different moments of their lives. For the majority, the school has been (and is) a place they attend to learn what they could not learn in the past; this is the case of this woman, who only had the opportunity to attend school for three years as a child because her family needed her to work to contribute to the family economy.

P3: Look, I came here to learn to read and write because I didn't know how. Well, I knew but very little. I attended school until I was nine, from six to nine. Three years. Then, I had ideas about school, because as a kid I was very bright... mainly for reading and writing. I didn't like math and religion! Well I had to leave school because my parents needed me to work.

(Interview with Maria)

This is a common situation among the adult learners. But this is also the case of the people who attend the school as a second opportunity (mainly young people who drop out of school or did not achieve the qualifications to pass the mandatory formal education). On the other hand, it is also common that people attend the school with the motivation to gain the credentials (qualifications) that will open the doors to the labor market; this is the case of the woman of the next quote:

P5: Well... in my house we had a need for money, an economic crisis and well I had never worked before, I was at home, taking care of my kids. And my husband was having

trouble finding a job and I said I will work. But I didn't have school qualifications and I knew that without qualifications I won't find a job, then I started looking for a job but also started studying to get my GED. This is how I started...

(Interview with Catalina)

Or there is also the case of those who want to do something that before was denied to them (for a given reason), like going to school or studying for a title (qualification). This quote is precisely from a person in this situation: what he wants is to achieve the requirements for an academic qualification, something that before was not possible. In addition, for this person it has a double purpose: personal accomplishment but also utility in finding a better position to access the labor market.

P8: This is something I wanted to do, like having some studies, you know? Having something, no? So I won't get stuck and limited. And of course, you can see it in the job, if you have a degree, some studies, your salary increases, and you can demand, if not, they demand of you. That is when I told myself, I am going to start.

(Interview with Diego)

Therefore, the analysis of these data indicates that the participant people arrive at this school looking for very different things: qualifications, education, personal achievements, etc. The way in which each and every person arrives at the school is different. Many of them go to the school because they have friends that already attend and they convince them to go to see how it works and in the end they decide to stay. Others go because they learn about the school by other sources (media, in the

neighborhood, in the stores, etc.) and then they visit the school to see how it is. The next quotes illustrate different ways people started attending the school at Verneda – Sant Martí.

P3: In my time there were no schools for adults. And when I moved to this neighborhood, because I use to live in Horta, and in 78-79 the school open, I learned about it while at work through the radio, that there was a new school opening. I came really scared and ashamed because I was ashamed of not knowing how to read and write at thirty... and...I still see that with the women that now have the same situation. Well I came and started at the second level of adult basic education.

(Interview with Maria)

P4: I also started in the second level of adult basic education, because two of my friends brought me here, they said, let's go to school.

I: They were already attending the school?

P4: no, they started at the same time I did. I have never liked it, and now at 52 do you want me to go to school? No, no, no... but well they said we were going to do it and we started.

(Interview with Carmen)

In the case of the second person, some resistance to attend the school can be appreciated initially. This is a frequent situation, and many times is the only barrier that excludes people from registering for courses at an adult education center. This is why I identify this element as an exclusory element. In the case of this person's quote, it was precisely the support of her friends that facilitated her final decision to register for

classes, which highlights the importance that the context has in the decision-making process.

Once the person registers in the school there are a lot of activities to do. Mainly I want to highlight that on many occasions the participants start at basic levels of education and then they feel empowered to take more advanced courses. This woman, for example, explains how she started at the basic levels of adult education and little by little she advanced, even through her trouble with mathematics. Finally she achieved her purpose and fulfilled the requirements for her title.

P3: Yes, basic levels... I.. you do addition, subtraction, dictation and my first year was there, then I moved to the certificate course and there I had to repeat because of the mathematics, because I am very bad at it. Later, I went to the GED class, and I took it in two parts, pre-GED and GED. And I always had to repeat because of the mathematics, but I did it by myself, I did not have any help, nobody...well my sister-in-law helped me a little, but I had to do it, she gave me clues and I had to do it. I know that there were girls that had extra help for math. Because I had never took that level of math and they were hard for me. Then, all the times that I repeated the GED was because of the mathematics, but I took all the subjects, because I though, coming only for math... I come for all the subjects...

I: I come for all the subjects... of course!

P3: Until I graduated!

(Interview with Maria)

This quote belongs to a man that when he retired he started to attend la Verneda – Sant Martí, to help and to give the school a hand. Then he registered and started studying

again, until he passed the university entrance exam, and for the last few years he had been studying for a university degree with excellent results.

P14: Exactly, then I started coming and one educator asked me why I was not a volunteer, then I started coming as a volunteer, and I helped in the secretary's office, filling records, and doing the things of the secretary's office, helping her. Then they started, why don't you prepare for the university entrance exam? Well, I took the course and later they encouraged me to take the exam, and I thought... what do I do? Then I took the exam...

I: what happened then?

P14: I passed at the first attempt.

(Interview with Santiago)

#### Participation in the school for adults La Verneda – Sant Martí

How do adult learners participate in the school for adults La Verneda – Sant Martí? And, more specifically, what does this participation have to do with the management model and functioning of the center? This is one of the key topics of my dissertation. Throughout the interviews there are a great amount of comments by the participants explaining how and in which ways they participate and get involved in the school activities. Without the effort and the commitment of the participants, the center easily would not exist.

The school of Verneda – Sant Martí is managed by the participants through two learners' associations (Agora and Heura). The origin of these two associations is the result of the demands of the same participant people. They were the ones who met and

decided that it was necessary to create two associations to be able to manage the school and avoid the administration (Government employee educators) assuming the management of the center. One participant, founder of the associations, explains the importance that this fact entailed.

P7: Well, I was one of the people who promoted them. Because among all the learners we thought in the year 1986, that it was advisable to create the associations in the school to work and claim things and help the school in all the possible ways. The only way we were strong was by creating an association.

(Interview with Manuela)

Just like this participant explains, the associations for the learners represent a unique way to enable them to manage by themselves the functioning of the school, from an egalitarian criterion in the participation that they wanted. This element is especially important because it sets the difference between this and other schools for adults, which are managed by a board of educators and professionalized administration. The Commissions composed by the same participant people are an identity sign of Verneda – Sant Martí School. The next quotes illustrate the importance of having these Commissions to channel the participation of adult learners in the school.

I: And... do you participate in other groups besides the association committee, in some other Commission...the activities one...

P2: yes...

I: which one for example...

P2: in the Planning Commission of activities, in which right now we are organizing the spring party.

I: and this a group of people that gets together to develop a specific activity in this case the spring party?

P2: yes, this is a group that decides things about the spring party, what we will do. We propose activities like visiting a museum, dances, things that we have in the school...we search, and then those are the different proposals, and after that we decide which ones will be more interesting for everybody such as movie debates or gatherings, and then everybody decides...

(Interview with Lucia)

Nowadays I have had to do a little less because of family matters, but usually I am a person that is always involved, I attend the literary gatherings... and well, all the meetings that they do or the women's group, which is a group of women where we talk about women's problems, you know? And people my age for example which kind of education we have had and things... or things incumbent to all women that is good that we talk about, and this is what I have learned over the years...

(Interview with Maria)

The people participating in this study highlight their involvement in different Commissions as a key element to organize the school activities. These Commissions also reach areas such as international partnership like the case of the Porto Alegre Commission.

I: Are you also in the Porto Alegre Commission? What do you do there?



P1: Well, we are in contact with schools of Porto Alegre and exactly today a woman from there is coming to prepare an interview that we will have on Friday...

I: And what do you do... do you explain to them what you do here in the school and they do the same? Or do you exchange experiences?

P1: Yes we exchange... experiences and they have sent us many...

I: Pictures and posters?

P1: Yes pictures and posters, and when we did the International Literacy Conference in Almeria it was really beautiful, we did a virtual conference. And since we see that they are really interested, we don't want to stay behind in sending them information.

(Interview with Antonia)

It is through Commissions like this one, that ties of common work are created (and friendship) that contribute to encourage more learning and collective work, as well as knocking down the barriers and cultural stereotypes because these experiences encourage participants to share experiences and learn from one another.

P2: Look in the Porto Alegre Commission, started in a moment that you already know... it started in a moment that has been very good, I think that the people in Porto Alegre may have had more interest than us, we have been a little... it has been very nice to be aware of how much can we learn from another country, from one adult school to another, there are things that adult people search for that is the same, they didn't have the opportunity to attend school, learn and about meeting other people that like them have the same enthusiasm of doing things, it is really nice, really nice...

(Interview with Lucia)

The school of Verneda, in addition, is located in a civic center in which takes part of other activities of the neighborhood through the neighborhood associations coordinator VERN. In this quote, this participant person displays the attitude and spirit that moves the participants in the school.

P11: And here we also work with the neighborhood, the people, whoever it is and from the school, and since you see everyday people of this neighborhood, this is a different rhythm, and from the school we always work for the neighborhood, the associations, we have a lot of contacts with VERN and it is also very interesting for the people of this neighborhood.

(Interview with Ismael)

The feeling of community, collective is the shared piece that appears time and time again in the arguments for participation of the participants in the school. It is the idea of creating a group, a unity that creates a particular identity, which is “being from Verneda”. This identity feeling has a clear definition that is democratic participation, direct, based in arguments, egalitarian, in which all individuals are accepted, without exclusions. Some examples of that are the management bodies of the school (COME, COSE, planning Commission of activities, that I will present later), always composed of participants, and open to everybody’s participation, without restrictions.

All the participant comments point to a common conclusion: that is, the importance of creating spaces to promote participation. The existence of these spaces facilitates channeling their participation and also facilitates working together to make the school work every day.

### Dialogic management

What is dialogic management? The participants define this kind of management as the result of dialog to make decisions needed for the functioning of the school. This is exactly how one of the interviewees defined this type of management:

I: What does dialogic management mean for you?

P2: management is management, dialogic is dialog, and dialog is how you say it... and the management is dialogic is how you do the things. In what do you spend, in how the management, the classes work... to me is something really important this type of management, when you dialog to achieve a purpose.

(Interview with Lucia)

The idea of dialog, a dialog in which all people can participate, and make contributions, is the main idea of the dialogic management. This is what another participant person says,

P4: Here, if you don't see it, you say, excuse me but I don't think this is correct, it may be correct, I don't say it's not, but I don't agree. You can say your opinion; here everybody can say their opinion. Everyone can voice their opinion. No one person is better than any other person.

(Interview with Carmen)

These ideas of dialog and consensus that appear in the discourse of the interviewees coincides with the idea of deliberative democracy of Elster, as well as the

achievement of consensus expressed by Habermas in his analysis of social action. In the following quote, a participant explains with her words what dialogic management in the school of La Verneda is; she explains that is in a way similar to the different kinds of democracy existing in the contemporary political sciences.

P3: Oh yes!... I have learned how you manage an association, how you do the assembly.

Also how to take part in the assembly, and know for example that there are different opinions and how to respect them... because you learn that in the dialogic literary gathering... I already know how from the dialogic literary gathering...

hahaha...democracy, no? It is not only that you are right, but you have to reach agreements.

(Interview with Maria)

Therefore, the participants define dialogic management as a concept that implies ideas of consensus, egalitarian participation, and dialog. The same person that explains that the management of the school is based in reaching agreements and consensus explains in detail how this occurs:

P3: You have to reach consensus in the meetings and respect the others' opinions and then evaluate and, that you learn in the association board meeting, and in the Commissions... we gather in Commissions, because the association board by itself can't make decisions, you have to count on the people, the members... how to say it, here all of us are members. For the fact of being a woman and participating in the Commissions. And then, I tell you again, when a new Commission is created, if you have to go and talk

to the politicians or organize a claim, or participate in the women's assembly then that is what we do in the Commissions.

(Interview with Maria)

In the discourse of this participant appear key elements such as the idea of “respecting other peoples’ words,” the idea that “we are all members,” the idea that the participants are the protagonists. This person explains how the school of Verneda works with the participation of the adults that attend the school. And, again, the creation of these spaces to channel this participation is a key element to promote participation and guarantee that the participants are the ones in control of the functioning of the school in their most essential aspects, such as this person explained with the example of “going to talk to the politicians.”

### Management Spaces

The opinions and comments of the participants state the importance of the management spaces in the dialogic management approach; for that reason I devoted this section to analyze how the management works.

P3: I participate in the Center Council, which is where all the participants meet and there is always a person from the different classes, where each of us explains what works or if there is something that we want to change. In this meeting all the board members and all the participants participate, another meeting point is the Monthly Commission (COME), which are montly, where all the volunteers participate and it is also open to all the participants that want to attend. This is something that I have also learned and in which I

participate. Then there are the Weekly Commissions (COSE) which is a more internal meeting of the educators that work daily in the school. In this Commission we meet, educators, the board members and participants, and it is open to everybody, we discuss daily things such as if we need another book for this or, if this class is working well. I don't know, daily problems that you have to face...and in the COME is more general, what we have accomplished over the month, if there are new projects, which projects are we doing, which activities is the school doing, what can we do, new proposals...this meeting is more general and the Center Council, I have already told you about.

(Interview with Maria)

In this quote this participant clearly explains how the school works from the main organizational groups, the COME (Monthly Commission) and the COSE (Weekly Commission). Both spaces have different responsibilities to face, but in both the egalitarian participation and the openness to learners' participation are the main characteristics of these spaces. The same participant explains in the following quote that all the activities of the school are decided in those spaces with the participation of all learners. That is how the school ensures that it is providing a response to the needs of the adult learners, not the interest of educators or the people hired by the associations in charge of the administrative part of the center (that works also for the volunteers).

P3: The Board (association board) meets once a month, now I don't remember the day, but it's not important, once a month. Then we call these people and get together for the meeting, but they are not the only ones, also other people attend like the volunteers, there is an agenda of the meeting and they say... we are going to talk about the earnings from this month, the projects we are conducting and the trips we have to do to Brussels (for

European projects)...we are going to have a party in the city, what do we want to do, it is not mandatory, we can decide to go or not to go... or for example there is a demonstration against the war in Iraq, things like that can also come up, then we discussed both in the board meetings and in the other meetings. And maybe there is a part of the meetings that are plain information, and other things we establish a debate and decide... for example which projects we want to do. For example, there is a new call on European projects, or there is a project from the local government. What and how do we want to do, do we submit a project, where? Then we make proposals and those ideas are gathered for the project proposal. Then the girls hired for this purpose write down the report for its submission.

(Interview with Maria)

This participant explains how the Commissions and the meeting spaces work. She clearly states that all decisions come from the common agreements of the participants. This quote illustrates how things work in the school, and the voice of this participant explains clearly the operation dynamics of the school. Here, it is noticeable the elements of egalitarian participation, dialog, consensus, highlighted in the prior section on dialogic management from other interviewees here become real and concrete. This person explains how those ideas of the organizational model translate to the practice. Again, the existence of spaces to channel the participation of the learners appears to be a crucial element to promote (and facilitate) the dialogic management of the center.

P3: For example, in the COME meeting first there is a time for explanations and then another time for working in groups. In those you can discuss any idea, of course about the topic. There you also decide about doing things, for example, demonstrations...

yes...how do you say that, when the war in Kosovo, we did in the Sant Jaume square (between the city council and the parliament of the Catalan Government), we put a stand to collect signatures, and to provide information about that war. All those things are also discussed in the board and in the assembly, maybe the idea comes from the COME, then you discussed in other spaces, this is how you come up with many ideas, we take note of them and immediately we start making decisions, depending on the opinions and the agreements we reach we set it or not as an objective to develop. We always take minutes of the meetings of all what we do.

(Interview with Maria)

In this quote, the participant person interviewed explains another important characteristic of the Monthly Commission (COME); this is that all the ideas and proposals are collected in the minutes of the meeting in order to have evidence of the idea for later being applied depending on the agreements of the meeting. This procedure ensures that the topics discussed in the Commissions and the agreements are not only words but written statements that later can be fulfilled. Somehow, the minutes are the evidence of the commitment achieved during the meetings.

P3: Now... the COSE, this is almost the same, they explain what we have done in the Board, see this week we had Board meeting and we have decided this... those are the projects and we explain what has been agreed. And what things will be done, and then there are groups, working groups to make proposals. Well, we can work on the proposal for a project, because the associations live from the projects. Not the school but the associations, that is why I talk so much about the projects, because in the associations everything is free, so we support that by means of the projects.

(Interview with Maria)



Now, both the Monthly Commission (COME), as well as the Weekly Commission (COSE) are two of the most important Commissions of the center (basically because are the Commissions that provide continuity, but do not depend on specific activities; those are permanent throughout the year), but those are not the only Commissions in the center. For each activity in the center there is a specific planning Commission of activities, composed by participants and volunteers that have the mission to organize the activity. Once the activity is over, the Commission also disappears. The next quote is an example:

P3: There is a trip at the end of the year. There is a Commission for parties. There is a proposal to go somewhere. You explain that to the board meeting, and the board presents that there are two options, going to one place or to Madrid where the literacy conference is going to take place...

(Interview with Maria)

For each of the activities that are developed from the school, the participants create a Commission in charge of managing and coordinating the required actions to prepare the activity.

Another central element in the functioning of the school of La Verneda – Sant Martí are the school day conferences. In this quote the participant person explains this activity:

P3: The associations rent a rural house and we go two days during a weekend. And everybody goes invited by the associations, the association pay for it, and everybody

goes, educators, volunteers, and participant like me, you know? And the participants, the student here, everybody who wants, because is free.

I: Yes

P3: And there, we make a work plan and we say we dream about proposals for the school, one of the last school conference I remember was the one in which I immediately said yes, let's do it, in which we wanted to put computers, we did not have computers and we thought it would be difficult. We had only one for administrative purposes but for most of the time did not work, in that gathering I remember we worked on how to get more computers, the future of it, why we the learners were interested on that, I remember there were a lot of ideas. And we work a plan and we have finally achieve it, now we have computers in the school in each classroom, all connected to Internet and we have a room only for Internet, we achieved that with a project from the Catalan Government. That is it, we dreamed about things in the two-day conference, and every year new ideas come up, another year, the school thought to write a book, memories, because the school has been working for more than 25 years now and everyone provided their experiences...

(Interview with Maria)

This is an activity that takes place once a year, and has two main characteristics: it is free and it is open to all the people involved in the school. The two-day conference is a very important moment in the life and management of the school, because it is the moment where the important topics regarding the school are discussed, how is it working; there is an assessment of what has happened until the moment, the participants evaluate the work completed for the prior year and then there is the moment to dream (the dreams are written down on a huge sheet of paper). This is a special moment, because it is as a group that all the participants dream which education they want, what are the important things the school should do, how and when.

On the other hand, the school also has projects financed by different administrations and organizations, such as the European Commission, the Catalan Government or other social activities financed by private organizations such as Caja Madrid (bank), for example. Again, the ones that participate in those projects are the participants. In fact, the quote of this participant expresses surprise that in other centers of adult education things do not work the same way:

P4: In the European projects, I was in two or three countries for a project with one of the educators. In those projects, the other countries are not in favor of attending with a participant person. But from the school, a participant always attends, because participants should go. It is not the same that they explained to you than if you can see it for yourself. I was at a meeting and one of the partners they did not bring any participant; they were five professors and not a single participant, why this people didn't bring any participant?  
(Interview with Carmen)

This person is surprised that in the project the other partners of the project attending the meetings are not the participant who goes to the management meetings, where the team decides what and how to do the activities. This is a clear difference between La Verneda – Sant Martí and other organizations dedicated to the work with adults, in terms of the implemented management and functioning approach. The dialogic management promotes the participation of all the people, but especially the participation of the ones receiving the education, not the educators and teachers or the administrative team. This is unusual, and in fact, it is one of the surprising differences of this school with other schools or adult education organizations:

I: And what do you think they learn, the ones you talk to when you go to a meeting, or when for example you go to the university to explain how the school works?

P7: Well... they are very surprised of how the school is organized and that we all manage the school. Some think it is very difficult. And it is not. There are some complications if you don't want to share your ideas with others, and if you want your idea to prevail. But if you think in the common good, and everybody works for that purpose, well it is not easy, but people are surprised by that. They are surprised that we can work that well without a director, without a director of studies and... you don't have to dedicate more hours than the necessary, because they distribute the schedule, it is true that there are a lot of volunteers also, that only with the professionals we won't be able to do that, we can do all that because of the volunteers. People get surprised about the things we do and we have accomplished.

(Interview with Manuela)

On the other hand, this “dialogic management” of the functioning of the center has direct consequences on the motivation and participation of the learners. For example, this person when interviewed stated that what he likes about the center is the fact that people are taken into account for all the decisions. That is, no decisions are taken away from the participant people, but the decisions come from them.

P14: In the Commissions, I participated in some Commissions, and what I liked the most was the democratic participatory atmosphere. What I like the most is that here no decision is taken pertaining to the participants without counting with them.

(Interview with Santiago)

The interactions in the school of La Verneda – Sant Martí

The dialogic approach implies a specific kind of relationship between the participant people in the school of Verneda – Sant Martí. It involves relationships of trust, respect, proximity, and responsibility in the development of activities and in the organization of the center.

I: How do people interact with each other, how do you interact with another participant that is from another group that you don't know and then you are in the same Center Council, which relationship do you have, what is your experience?

P1: Well, nobody is a stranger because although I have never met them before, when you are in the groups, in the meeting, all the opinions are valid, although ones will be more interesting than others.

(Interview with Antonia)

This person explains in the interview that the fact of not knowing another person with whom they are sharing the meeting is not relevant. The important fact is that all the people participating in the school know that their opinion is valuable. This fact makes them feel valued and with more confidence to express their points of view.

I: How would you describe the interaction of the participants among them?

P2: Let's see...many start deep bonds and... let me say... some people realized that many didn't know anybody when they got here, and meeting here in the school, starting in the same level, learning together... those are really deep ties...they are living common experiences and you can see that. For example, today, one woman was telling another to explain her something, she started telling how she does it, and you see how the first one

was looking at her with affection like saying thank you with your eyes, you know? It has even moved me...or the help that a man with mental disability was offering another women because he knew how to do that, those are very especial bonds and that will be impossible if it wasn't in this school of dialog.

(Interview with Lucia)

In this quote this person highlights another of the effects of the dialogic approach; this is the effect that has on the self-esteem of the participant when they find themselves in an environment where they are valued, and they start from their knowledge, and not from what they do not know, like in other centers where the education starts from the compensatory action of supposed deficits. In Verneda, on the contrary, everything works from the basic idea of the pedagogy of maximums (Freire) and the starting point is all what the learners already know, to build up from those learnings the new ideas and concepts through dialog with the other people in the classroom. In terms of management, this also has an impact in the functioning of the center, because the center is organized around the contributions of all the participants. The result, as this participant explains, is the creation of close ties between individuals at the same time that promote team work and solidarity.

I: How do people interact between participants and educators or volunteers, what kind of relationships do you have?

P5: What kind of relationships... very good, if it wasn't for them, I won't dare to do the things that now I am able to do.

(Interview with Catalina)

P8: I want to highlight that here the teacher is not the teacher that it is up here and the students are here, of course the teacher has to maintain a distance this is ok, no? But there is like a unity, the idea of doing something all together. It even gives you security, and more enthusiasm to come back. Because when I studied in EGB (mandatory elementary and middle education) I remember the quarrels and even if you asked the teacher with good intentions, but if in 10 minutes you asked more than 2 questions then, he will respond you rudely and then that made your self-esteem go down a little, no? There are people who need more help than others.

(Interview with Diego)

Those two quotes are one of multiple evidences that the dialogic approach makes people lose their fear to participate in the discussions and they can make their own contributions. This approach promotes the inclusion of all the voices, not only the voices of some. This is very important because, just as the person in the second quote says, many times participants attend the school with the memories of how they were treated in other schools, when they were young, where they were not so much taken into account. And those memories create some rejection toward the school as an institution, because in another time they felt rejected. The egalitarian relationship helps to break those barriers, and this is a transformative way to achieve the inclusion of everybody.

From a personal and emotional point of view the effect that this approach has on people is very important. Many of the participants are people who come from spaces in which what they have to say they has not been taken into account and they have to face new situations and their fears. For that reason, the possibility to establish an egalitarian relationship with all the people in the school is a very important aspect for their own

motivation and self-esteem, as well as for their continuous participation in the school.

Just as this participant explains in her interview:

I: How would you describe the feeling you have when you walk into the school, that everybody says hello to each other, that there is this atmosphere that you are fine, how would you describe it?

P7: Well, that is like if you were at home, it is very easy, if you come inhibited, thinking who am I going to find? And then, in reality they treat you so well, and the people is so nice that in two days you are relaxed and you feel you have come to this school all your life.

(Interview with Manuela)

On the other hand, there are also other topics such as diversity.

P3: There are people from very different levels, nationalities... the same that in the classroom, there are people who are Arab, people of color, and their participation is the same as any other person, we all have the same freedom to talk and no discrimination. Nothing. I don't... there is no discrimination because you are from somewhere else, or because you are from here. We are participants, we are working together for an idea, and each of us make proposals, of course maybe a person is from Arab origin wants to learn Catalan or Spanish, and for example another person already knows it, but wants to learn English, but I want to say, it is the same, in the board, in all the group, she or he has the same, there is no discrimination. Another thing that happens in all the groups is that we respect each other's opinions, no? There is always a chairperson, that takes notes for the minutes of the group, and this chairperson also writes down who wants to talk and gives turns so we all respect each others turn... and we listen to each other... and these people



feel integrated and they are very happy participating in the meetings and everything. I don't do any, there is no discrimination, they participate in everything, all the same.

(Interview with Maria)

Another of the main characteristics of the dialogic approach is stated by this person in his interview about the integration of all the voices, without looking at where they come from or their background. All people at La Verneda are equal; they all have the same opportunities of participating (because there are spaces created to promote this egalitarian participation). This is another of the main characteristics of this approach. As it can be seen in the discourse analysis of this participant's statement, the kinds of relationships created in these environments are egalitarian relationships, deeply democratic in which respect among people is fundamental. This is a type of inclusion.

P13: Speaking on equal terms. Because I have seen teachers in class in which a person gave their opinion and the teacher sitting in the table, stopped and made this person to get up and explain, for a teacher to sit next to a student... you don't see that everywhere. And things like teachers joking, always in a good mood. That is why I say... we speak on equal terms.

(Interview with Rafael)

### The analysis of the participation

The Verneda – Sant Martí is a school with its origins in the participation of the adult learners. This “spirit” is still present in the people who attend classes there and that in one way or another participate in activities promoted by the school. In the next quote,

one of the interviewed persons provides some comments about this characteristic of the school when she affirms that it is open to the whole neighborhood, that is, the participation and involvement of all the people that live in the neighborhood in which the school is located.

P3: It is open to the neighborhood, to all the meetings, it is open to the neighborhood, because the school is part of the neighborhood, you know that this school was claimed by the neighborhood, by a group of families and by the neighborhood associations and a group of teachers, I think... then the school is a popular school, a school open to the neighborhood.

(Interview with Maria)

What is special about the direct participation of all adult learners in the management of the center? In the next quote the interviewee states that the most important thing is how this school really responds to the demands and needs of the participant people. That is crucial. The direct participation of all the people that in one or other way are involved in the school guarantees that the demands are directly channeled without any kind of interventions.

I: Why do you think it is important that learners participate in the board meetings, in the Commissions...

P5: because we are the ones who know what we want, what we need. And trying to find that is our purpose.

(Interview with Catalina)

Just as another interviewee states, the open and democratic participation is one of the elements that explains the good functioning of the school. Without this participation, the school will not have the same success, because just as this person says it is absurd to say that the contributions of the participants will not be taken into account, if those are as valuable as the contributions of educators.

P6: It is very important that everyone participates in this things, because if no one participates is like... no... If people participates the school works well, better with a lot of people, a lot of ideas, not just one, I am sure the educators will have great ideas but is better to listen to our ideas.... Maybe a student has a better idea and the school works better for that.

(Interview with Diana)

However, how is this participation? Again, one of the interviewees responds to this question with her words:

I: What can you do in those meetings? Do they let you participate until certain point, can you do anything, or you can only go to listen?

P7: No, no, no, we have all the rights of voice and vote, that is, we can give our opinion, we can vote, if we have to reach that situation, but we never have to cast a vote, because we achieve consensus, we talk and reach agreements and what everybody thinks is better for all of us is what we democratically do.

(Interview with Manuela)

Participation is involvement with full right of vote and voicing one's opinion. In general, the usual functioning of the school is that the agreements are reached by consensus, that is, taking into account the demands and all the contributions and then, the decision is made in the account that it is beneficial for everybody. Using an approach based on the egalitarian dialog, like the dialogic management model of organization, is a form of encouraging the participation of everybody so that all the participants feel comfortable to state their opinion and reach agreements.

I: And how do you think or feel that the participant people promote more dialog, more participation... more this kind of management for the school?

P2: First, individuals are valued as people. Not by their qualifications, then when you have the opportunity you can explain much more. It is like being home. If there is dialog, the home will work much more better and we all will have better management. That is what I think, we all learn the culture of dialog and then you reach a point in which dialog is present in everything and the management works much better. And also, people will say and explain what do they like and what not.

(Interview with Lucia)

The fact of valuing everybody's opinion is fundamental to make all participants feel included and that their opinions count. This is a central aspect; without it the promotion of participation is much more complex. Equality and mutual respect are essential aspects to promote participation, because if there is no participation you can not promote anything, just as another participant person stated. It is only through participation that things, ideas, and actions can be proposed. For that reason fears and

barriers should be eliminated, just as the analysis of the participants' discourse has demonstrated those fears and barriers are part of the environments where people do not feel valued, their opinions are not taken into account as much as other members of the community and they feel judged by their opinions.

I: How do you think the participants promote this kind of dialogic management?

P3: How do I think they....

I: How do you think they promote it?

P3: Well, participating, without participation no, no, no they don't promote anything.

Well, they promote, by... by attending, having ideas, making proposals, participating.

(Interview with Maria)

On the other hand, the possibility for everyone to participate is a crucial element because without this possibility the school will not work (this is what this participant explains with the metaphor of the gears of a machine).

P14: But if you are a part, even if it is a very small part of a gear, how will I say it, the awareness that we have self-affirmation of saying I do something. You know that maybe you do very little because another does a lot, but that is not important, the important thing is to participate in that gear of the machinery. We know that a big machinery does a lot, but a small part of the machinery also has its mission, no? Maybe if the small part is not there the big machinery can't work as well...

(Interview with Santiago)

The participant people who know how the school of La Verneda – Sant Martí works believe that the way of this school functioning is exceptional.

I: How would you define this, this team work together?

P8: Wow... no idea... impressive... how would I define it? I don't know... I don't know if you can give it a name, really. But working in groups, team work. Listen and being listened to. It is like that, listening and being listened to. Raising your hand and talk. And even some day going in front of the class and explaining it yourself, a lot of participation, here the teacher puts him or herself in the position of the students.

(Interview with Diego)

This feeling sets the difference of this school with others, but at the same time is a key element that provides incentive for more participation because it actually works and, like this participant stated, it is impressive and increases the motivation to continue participating.

### Achievements of the dialogic management

The dialogic management approach has a definite impact on many levels. The interviewed people highlight the transformations from the teaching and learning point of view. But they also point out a great transformation in their social environment, the neighborhood and their relationships with the people they know. This impact also reaches the personal level, mainly that of self-esteem. In the next quote, one of the interviewed persons indicates that both the type of management (dialogic management) and

participation of the center at Verneda are two complementary elements. In her words, one feeds the other and vice versa.

I: What relation do you see between the fact that the people participate in the management and what they learn. How do you relate management and learning?

P3: Well, you learn more, of course! These are two things that complement each other. I learned things that I didn't know, things I didn't know I knew, once I told a teacher, I went there and I talked and I said things I didn't know I knew. When you manage the association and you have to go to a talk [meeting]... you have to explain what you have done, or what your colleagues are doing or what you are going to do, well, I had assumed all that, but I didn't know I knew it.

I: Yes

P3: Then, being there, and being able to explain it is like, that I have learn that although I already knew it, I don't know if you understand the idea of what I am saying.

I: Yes, that you become conscious about it.

(Interview with Maria)

In this quote the interviewee highlights another important element, which is that the participation in the associations is also a learning element of how to participate. It is the evidence of the statement that to participate you learn participating. Besides, this kind of learning appears related with the development of an active and critical citizenship. Further on in the same interview, the participant highlights again the importance of the participation and of being in an environment in which participation is encouraged to learn and develop a democratic attitude.

I: How do you think the school benefits from the participation of all these people, from the participants that want to manage the school with this approach, dialogic, democratic....

P3: I think, I think, it benefits from it, is more democratic, it is not static, because if this school only did the formal education, the instruction come from the government, the Generalitat, the teachers have a fix itinerary, they have, how do you say.... a... defined program...

I: And that is...

P3: And that is it. And in many places... the people who are in literacy [first level of adult basic education] have come here bored. Because they told them that because they are adults they are not going to learn more, and because you are not going to learn more, the teacher does not have any interest. Then they give you whatever they want, and then they couldn't care less. And they don't care, but here because there are two associations they are more obliged, because we have the Council of the center and we make comments and critics. If we say in my math class... the person who is teaching I don't understand him or her, or I don't like how he or she does it... Well, after that, you have to solve it in class. And I don't know, this is like, I think the school benefits because there is more openness, it is not static, there are more ideas, the associations have ideas and we all collaborate. Above all, I think it is not to get blocked in the routine and knowing that there are all those spaces that help.

(Interview with Maria)

On the other hand, the direct participation of the adult individuals in the management spaces is also a form of quality control of the education they are receiving not allowing a Board of Directors composed by educators to decide how to organize the education in the school. So this management model is a way to ensure the interests of the



participants, and this is another of the achievements of the dialogic management unlike other management models.

The development of a critical and participatory attitude inherent in the application of the dialogic management has other transformational effects such as the impact of the school in the neighborhood. The next quote is by a participant that explains how the school has been the driving force for change in the neighborhood, in action as specific as succeeding in getting a subway in the neighborhood, or mobilizations by some kind of claim; such is the case of several mass demonstrations in which participants of the school have participated.

I: What transformations do you think has the school done in the neighborhood?

P4: Towards the neighborhood a tone... because for example, first the main one is the subways, we did a lot of dissemination, many demonstrations, until we manage to get the line 2 of the subway. Another one, when the war in Kosovo in the St. Jaume square, we went many times to demonstrate... and then for the widows...

I: Uhum

P4: For the widows, every 25<sup>th</sup> of the month, we go outside or demonstrate so we could live with more than the widow benefit that we now have. Many demonstrations. Another one, to cover the Gran Via [street], we have done a lot of demonstrations, a lot.

(Interview with Carmen)

The impact of these events not only affects the social sphere. It also creates a great personal transformation. In this quote, the interviewee explains how the egalitarian participation of the school let her see that other people were living her same situation.

The communication facilitated by the egalitarian dialog allows each person to become aware of how they take part in society, that they are not alone and that they can count on the help of other people in similar situations. The solidarity that takes place in those situations is fundamental to transform the situations of exclusion.

P14: And then you realize that you are transforming inside and you see that your problem is no longer only your problem but there is a lot of people with the same problem, you know? So, when people start realizing about that they start giving, there is a will for participating and not to be a person as a student, there is a transformation and now is a person that comes here not only to learn but someone who also comes to participate. A person who participates in the Council, participates in any activity of the school, recreational activities, if there are parties then you participate, or a gathering or a demonstration for example in defense of peace and against war, people participate. I don't know, the people goes from being a student to being a participant and they find a new appreciation I should say because I have met people that they came to school and then they had to work and they can't come for a while and as soon as you tell them that the school needs something they come running because they have this feeling of appreciation how would I say it, of appreciation and will to collaborate so other people can participate. I don't know if I am explaining myself.

(Interview with Santiago)

Again, the following two quotes support the idea of personal transformation emphasizing the emotional impact that their participation in the school had for these people. The overcoming of personal barriers is another of the achievements obtained with an approach such as dialogic management, because spaces in which the people feel

confidence are created, and this is the first step to overcome the difficulties that people may find throughout life.

I: Which transformations do you think the school has done?

P2: Oh yes... in the neighborhood, transformations of the neighborhood. But the most radical transformations I won't say have been in the neighborhood but the people, many people I am telling you...today there was a woman that reads a little...and she was saying with tears in her eyes... I didn't know how to read and write or nothing, because my husband use to do all that and now I can... another woman says... I had to work and I didn't know, I saw that all of them were sign in and I ask to one woman to write my name and then I will go and copy it, I didn't know what was written...is the transformation of the person! You feel good, happy; you feel ... I don't know. That the ignorant is the person who has to say ups, I forgot my glasses!... before I had to ask, and say I don't understand, but now I know how to write. This is the independence of the person, independence.

(Interview with Lucia)

I: And now that you know more about it, you have been here for three years, you said three isn't it?

P10: Yes about three.

I: Now that you have been here for more time, how has [being here] changed the feeling that you first had?

P10: It has changed a lot, totally, everything. I think so. Because before, only speaking about this topic was impossible, it would have been impossible talking to you or to talk in front of people in a conference, I would have never done that. Then, I have overcome my fear here, totally. I see a lot of people that don't dare to talk. I have lost that fear, thanks to the people here. They give you that opportunity, they have confidence in you.

I: Do you see any transformation in yourself or other people that you know?

P10: Transformation yes, there has been transformation mainly in me and many people that comes here. Because as I was telling you before, in the beginning I was very shy and now I talk and everything.

I: Now you talk, you mean you didn't talk at all, nothing?

P10: It was impossible, yes, yes, really shy. And transformation, I think there is transformation.

(Interview with Juan)

The result, just like another participant person states, is that "it improves your life." The possibility of making decisions about your own life allows you to have more autonomy; you go to places with more self-confidence and this way, like this participant says, you feel that more doors open your way wherever you go. Like she says, "the school gives you life."

P2: One thing I have to say of this school is that it has improved many people's life in many ways, improving their work life, improving many areas, it has opened many doors to plenty of places, and I think it is something that has given us life! I think that if you are ok it gives you well-being, the school is something that enriches you, and values people.

(Interview with Lucia)

### ***Summary of the dialogic management analysis from the participants' point of view***

At the beginning of this study I had three main questions; those were my focus of interest (see Table 3). I wanted to study with this research what occurs in the center of

adult education when the dialogic management model is applied, paying attention to elements such as the perception of the adults who participate in this dialogic management and what that means for them.

The analysis of the data collected over the fieldwork presented interesting evidence that allow me to state that the dialogic model has a clear transformational impact in the participant people. And this is true on different levels: both personal and social. In the following section I discuss each one of the research questions on the basis of the data collected.

It is important, as a starting point, to take into account that many people that participate in the school of La Verneda – Sant Martí are people that did not have the opportunity in their youth to go to school, or they had to leave the school because of reasons unconnected with the school. Another important group was comprised of those who did not pass the formal education courses, and they dropped out of school. La Verneda, for all these people, mean a second opportunity for studying. But it has further implications than studying and obtaining a qualification; for many people at La Verneda it is also a personal challenge, a way to demonstrate to them that everything they know is valuable and that they are able to learn new things and concepts. This is a habitual element in the area of adult education and it is crucial to take into account the starting point of many of these people that now are fully participating and entirely trusting the school of La Verneda. Almost all of them started with a lot of fear and without daring to make contributions in public. This is one of the greatest transformations that occurs because of this management model and responds exactly to my first research question.

**Table 3: Analysis of the emerging categories from the participants' discourse  
according to research questions**

		Exclusory dimension	Transformative dimension
What occurs in the dialogic management of the learning center?	How do adult learners interact among themselves and with the workers of the center?		<i>Management Spaces:</i> Egalitarian dialog, Relationships
	How do adult learners interact with the community?		<i>Time and activity:</i> VERN, FACEPA Congresses, Commissions Associations of the school, Porto Alegre Commission
	What do adult learners perceive the dialogic management promotes?		<i>Definitions:</i> Dialogic management <i>Management Spaces:</i> achievements of management, needs and demands
How do adult learners perceive their participation in the dialogic management?	What are the different reasons why people participate in the management of the center?		<i>History:</i> Recognition Immigration and class consciousness Time and activity
	How do participants perceive their involvement process?		<i>School Attraction</i> <i>Management Spaces:</i> Organization-functioning, participation, decision making
What does being involved in the community mean for adult learners in the center?	How do participants understand participation and learning?	<i>Management Spaces:</i> participation perception	<i>Management Spaces:</i> participation perception
	How do participants perceive themselves and others in relation to participation?		<i>Social transformation:</i> self- esteem – self-confidence, self- awareness

*What occurs in the dialogic management of the learning center?*

The first subordinate question in this section was: How do adult learners interact among themselves and with the workers of the center? The data show that the interactions between participants themselves and participants with the people who work in the center are always based on relationships of equality. Just as I stated above, with the quotes of the participants on dialogic management, egalitarian dialog and relationships based on respect are key elements of the interactions inside the school. These kinds of relationships allow people to feel secure to make their contributions, and how these contributions are valued is a fundamental element to increase the participants' self-esteem. The result is that, on the one hand, the participants are highly motivated to stay in school, and on the other hand, they gain confidence and security, which translates into positive effects for their own personal lives.

The second subordinate question was: How do adult learners interact with the community? The answer to this question can be found in all the contributions that the interviewees made about the ways of participation in the school, by creating channels of communication with the community in which the school is located. Examples of that is the participation of the school in neighborhood movements, local and even international initiatives such as the case of the Porto Alegre Partnership with Brazil. It is through spaces like Vern, the coordinator association of the neighborhood organizations, or FACEPA, the federation of educational and cultural associations of adult education in Catalonia, that La Verneda is present in the community and passes on its way of doing by means of the dialogic management. From the interviews conducted many people stated

that through their participation in the school they had even gotten involved in activities such as going to talk to politicians and people in the administration or to participate in international meetings of the European projects managed from the school. In all the cases, the attitude of dialog to establish consensus and achieve agreements defines how participants of the school interact with the community.

The third subordinate question was: What do adult learners perceive the dialogic management promotes? The people participating in this study state that the dialogic management not only has an impact on the personal level (from an emotional point of view), but it also has a clear social impact. This management model promotes more solidarity, egalitarian and more democratic kinds of interactions. The people who participate in the school have been the protagonists of many demands, and its democratic functioning makes the participants become critical citizens that act with full responsibility in topics of social interest in their neighborhood, city, etc. The dialogic management promotes this kind of attitude, given what one of the interviewees said during the fieldwork, by participating in the school associations is what teaches you to participate. And this is a basic attitude in a democratic society. Besides, the school, with how it works, also promotes a life attitude directed to the achievement of the peoples' dreams and hopes. This lively approach is perceived in the analysis of many of the participants of the study's comments, also as a consequence of an environment of interactions that promote personal self-esteem, self-value and in which they recognize themselves as active agents able to make contributions and of transforming the circumstances of the more immediate reality.



*How do adult learners perceive their participation in the dialogic management?*

The second research question with which I started this study was: How do adult learners perceive their participation in the dialogic management? After considering all the data collected for this study, the answer to this question is the freedom all the interviewed people felt in participating with no fear in all the areas and levels of the school, from the teaching, the content, how to teach, to the more administrative areas such as the tasks of the secretary office of the school. In all those spaces, the key idea the participants share is the freedom they feel of participating and contributing with their points of view, knowledge and ways of doing.

The first subordinate question for the second research question was: What are the different reasons why people participate in the management of the center? There are varied reasons. Each individual has his or her own reasons, but the common element in all the interviews was the desire to be “one more part of the school.” The different reasons why people participate in the management of the center are different. There are those who participate because they took part in the beginning of the school and they feel it is part of their life. Others participate because it is a way to provide their point of view and let others know his or her demands for discussion. Just as one of the interviewees states, there was a moment in which it was very clear that the participants had to be the ones to manage the school in order to avoid that the teachers decided in agreement with their professional needs. This is why the participants got together to create the associations, these are the ones that since the mid 80s managed the school and guaranteed that the participants are the ones who decide what is happening on the basis of an

egalitarian dialog. The idea is that the people participate in the center so nobody decides for them or imposes decisions on them that do not answer to their needs and demands.

The second subordinate question was: How do participants perceive their involvement process? Here the most repeated basic idea that appears in the interviews is the equality. The people perceive their participation as egalitarian. They highlighted that every person has voice and the capability to participate, that all contributions are listened to and equally respected, as well as that the different comments have the same value on the basis of validity and not because of the position of the person making the comment. The important part of their involvement in the process is to reach consensus that incorporate the opinion of all individuals and not creating situations in which one position wins over the others. All these aspects characterize the dialogic management from the participants' point of view, and creates a clear picture of how the participants perceive their involvement in the school.

*What does being involved in the community mean for adult learners in the center?*

Finally, the third research question of this study was: What does being involved in the community mean for adult learners in the center? The interviewed people offered many testimonies about what it means for them being involved in the center and the community. It means a personal transformation: many of the participants come from environments where they are not taken into account, their job is not valued and neither are their opinions nor points of view. Then, they get to a center where their voice is important, in which there are spaces where they can participate without fear, freely and in

which who they are and what they say is valued. At the personal level there are resounding changes. For many people I interviewed (and this is also common to other participants of the school), their participation in the school means, above all, an affirmation of their personal identity. On the other hand, it also means a transformation on the social level. The interviewed people state that suddenly they start participating in activities of the neighborhood, in demonstrations and other spaces such as associations and organizations, which benefits them in their identity as critical democratic actors. In any case, the fact of being involved in the community means for these people to take an active role that they did not have previously.

The first of the subordinate questions of this section was: How do participants understand participation and learning? Equally to the analysis of other questions, the ideas of equality and respect are the center of how the participants understand participation and learning. Those are two of the basic ideas that explain the success that this style of management of adult education has, and why the school of La Verneda has year after year an increasing number of registrations, because more and more people want to know and live the experience. A negative comment, and a negative note to the study in this case, will be that the individuals that because of work can not devote more time to the school and therefore can not participate as much in the management of the center stated to find themselves learning just enough from these processes and desire to be able to be more involved and learn more.

The second of the subordinate questions was: How do participants perceive themselves and others in relation to participation? In this case, the transformation of how the participant people perceive themselves in relation to others is obvious. Many of these

people stated in their interviews how at the beginning they did not dare to go to the school, it will cause them panic to be in a public space where they had to defend their opinions or they simply felt less than other people. They felt ashamed of being in a class with other people because they did not have academic qualifications. The possibility of sharing those feelings and through the dialogic management, by creating spaces in which they felt secure and confident to express themselves with freedom helped to transform their perception and how they perceived others. The egalitarian dialog present in the school facilitates their ability to perceive others as active agents, with voice and with real opportunities to be respected by other peers.

#### **Data analysis from the teachers' point of view**

In the second section of this chapter I concentrated on presenting and discussing the data obtained from the interviews with educators at the school of La Verneda – Sant Martí. Table 4 shows the emerging analysis categories from the data collected.

Many of the categories that emerged from the discourse analysis of the educators were like the emerging categories from the participants. In this section I define the categories that were different; otherwise the definitions are the same.

The *definitions* category presented descriptions of the dialogic learning principle *equality of differences* in addition to the items previously presented.

**Table 4: Analysis of the emerging categories from the educators' discourse**

Categories	Subcategories
History	Recognition Immigration and class consciousness Racism
School Attraction	
Time and activity	VERN FACEPA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Congresses</li> </ul> Commissions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Porto Alegre Commission</li> </ul> School Associations
Definitions	Dialogic learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Solidarity</li> <li>▫ Equality of differences</li> </ul> Dialogic management
Management spaces	Organization – functioning Relationship Participation Achievements of management Needs and demands Decision making Participation perception
Social transformation	Self-esteem – self-confidence
Learning Community	Participation Voluntary work
Learning	Active learning
Citizenship	
Democracy	
Participation	Democratic participation
Governance	
Values	Autonomy Readiness for innovative practices

*History* was an important category in which comments about the school history intertwined with personal histories. Three subcategories were defined: a) recognition, which gathered data on historical events in which the school was recognized by the community or by institutions; b) immigration and class awareness gathered data on what the educators defined as personal experiences on being immigrants (from other areas of Spain and from other countries) and the connections they made to the concept of class; and c) racism gathered comments of the educators about this topic.

*Social transformation* gathered explanations of the educators on personal and social transformations they were aware of related to their participation in the school. One subcategory was defined. Self-esteem/self-confidence collected the comments on personal transformations affecting their self-esteem or self-confidence.

*Values* collected the comments of the educators on social and educational principles of participants and educators. There are two subcategories: Autonomy, which gathers comments on self-sufficiency expressed from the educators of the study, and readiness for equity and readiness for innovative practices both from the participants and educators involved.

In the next pages I present the contributions of the educators I interviewed for this study. Just like I did in the case of the participant people, I use the quotes to include directly their voices and create a dialog with them in these pages.

## History

The social and grassroots origin of the school of La Verneda – Sant Martí also appears as one of the first contributions from the educators interviewed on the fieldwork of this project. Just as this person states:

E4: Actually there is a lot of relation with the neighborhood, I mean the project of the school is not a closed project, historically has been a project connected to the neighborhood and it has always had an approach directed to be present in the neighborhood.

(Interview with Luisa)

There is a common agreement in the idea that the school's identity is defined mainly because of its origin in a social movement led by the participant people of the school. This is a very important statement, because it also contributes to establish the limits and the framework in which the educators define their role in the school. In fact, the educators I interviewed agree in stating that the main protagonists of the school are the participant people. They are the ones that make the decisions and the ones that take the initiatives. One of the educators I interviewed explained an anecdote of an event that later became a regular annual activity of the school: the cultural trips.

E2: Everything was circumstantial, and in the line of the school in which the participants manage the school. I was in a class, we were studying Michelangelo and Michelangelo's David, with slides, because at that time we still used slides, we were looking at proportionality... And then, Maragall [future mayor of Barcelona] appeared here. He was in his political campaign when he became mayor. He was campaigning here in the

school. He came in our class and he said: well this statue is not proportional, and you can not see it well, for that you have to see it live. And the people took his word, and told him why don't you pay us the trip, we are here working with volunteers, and he said yes, he would do it.

(Interview with Cristina)

### Who are the educators?

Before presenting the analysis of the educators discourse I briefly explain who the educators are in order to better understand the context where the study was conducted.

The educators at La Verneda – Sant Martí have different backgrounds. There are individuals who are civil servants as in Government employees, others have been hired by the associations under specific projects and they come from different areas (university, social movements, etc.), and others are volunteers. The difference between them is that while the civil servants have to be named by the administration, in the case of the people hired under association projects is the school who makes the decision (not the Government administration). On the other hand, there are also the volunteers of the school. These people come from many different areas, from former participants of the school, neighbors of the area that know the school and decide to stay and collaborate, and even faculty from different universities in Barcelona. The next quotes are an example that illustrates the diversity among educators at La Verneda:

E1: Look, I retired two years ago. I retired at sixty, voluntarily and I really desired to retire and do something else, something new. Then at work I started asking, I was interested in doing something with teaching because I liked it and I am a secondary



education teacher although I never practiced, and then, I retired and now I am practicing...

(Interview with Margarita)

I: And how did you find out about the school?

E2: I found this school because... in a summer school I met one of the teachers, I already knew some people and I was already involved in adult education as a volunteer in AEPA and here they had a vacant spot and I got the position. I wanted to go to another area, but I started here as temporary worker, always with the idea to leave. And as you can see, I never did.

(Interview with Cristina)

E3: I am a civil servant and within this status I would say that now my position is more permanent than before. Previously I had to renew my position every year, but with the years you get sort of points in a scale and now I am more stable in this position.

(Interview with Julia)

### School Attraction

The educators I interviewed coincide with each other in expressing their enthusiasm in working in a school such as la Verneda – Sant Martí. Just as one educator states:

E2: I quickly got hooked, and until now.

(Interview with Cristina)

Experiencing how the school of La Verneda is organized and how it functions immediately motivates the people that work there.

E1: And it is... how comfortable the people who come here feel. Both, the participant and the volunteer as well as the people who work here. This is what really attracts my attention; this is a very special school. Because there is also people that come from other schools and they tell you: oh no, in that school mmm....we walked to the teacher's table so he will tell us what to do. And well, here is not like that. You are in a group, you go first to this person and then to the other, you see what they are doing, while one is reading the other is writing.

(Interview with Margarita)

In addition, as this prior quote states, there is a clear consciousness of the difference of this school to other centers of adult education, in which people are treated as students in the framework of a scholar management model and functioning (Medina, 1997). This scholar approximation has a negative consequence which is that the participant people do not appreciate the school as much. On the other hand, in a social and dialogic model, like the one used in La Verneda, the participant people feel protagonists of their education. From the educators' point of view, their job totally changes: from "watchman or watchwoman" of the knowledge to colleague and partner of the learning process, that helps and puts his or her knowledge to the service of the participant people, so between everybody they all succeed in advancing in the knowledge. This is a key element that explains the great acceptance of this approach

among all the people that know and live this experience at the school of Verneda – Sant Martí.

The identity of the school of Verneda – Sant Martí from the educators' point of view

The school of Verneda – Sant Martí has become a source of reference in Barcelona through the years. People from other neighborhoods and professionals of other services are surprised when they learn about the school and how it works; this is what one of the educators explained about an administrator of one of the Labor Offices of Barcelona:

E4: There are several services with which we are in contact, the social services here, the ones in Pau and the ones in San Roc. Also we are in contact with CAPS, the medial centers of first attention, with hospitals although not directly, but they send many cases over here, you know? Many times older people, it is another service for example, the other day a girl that works at the OTG (Office of Temporal Work) came and she didn't know the activities we did here, we explained to her and she was moved and she said but can we really send people here to get an education?... Yes, yes this is completely free of charge, so there are no worries, and we are interested in being present in the neighborhood and not be isolated, you know?

(Interview with Luisa)

The image with which the school is known (both in Barcelona as well as in other areas of the world) is of a space of egalitarian participation managed by the participant people. The educators I interviewed during the fieldwork highlighted the high level of

participation as an element of school identity and this is also one of the most appreciated elements by the people who come to the center to learn about the experience and how it works, as stated by this educator:

E3: It has been from the visits of Liz Suda that came from Melbourne, Australia, or the visit of John Comings, from Harvard and many others, this has made possible the dissemination of the school. This model, is a model that makes the people feel at the center of the participation, you know, at the center of the action and this is what the people that comes to visit likes to see.

(Interview with Julia)

On the other hand, these educators also highlight the idea that the school does not belong to one person or a group of specific people. On the contrary, it belongs to everybody (and mainly to the participant people).

It is nobody's and it is everybody's, I will change many things of the school, but it is not one person who decides! And for sure everybody would like to change something, no? Because I like this thing and you like this other, but this is the interesting part of the school that is a consensus of everybody, and then I cannot decide on something of the school, because the school is not from one person but everybody's, and we all have to take part in the decision, in a class, in a Commission, in one of the decision-making spaces, in a meeting in the secretary, in a COSE, in a COME....

(Educators Communicative Discussion Group)

The school is also known by other elements, such as the critical approach towards aspects such as stereotypes that usually can be found in our society. In the school, the same daily practices, the living together and the sharing of experiences, are a way of overcoming all those stereotypes.

E3: Because sometimes society expresses through the media ideas that are not very democratic, you know. Ideas on repeating stereotypes against different ethnic groups and those ideas here are overcome. There is an important interest in debating in any group in which the topic comes up to reflect and breaking those topics, the prejudices, the exclusory stereotypes; and this is very important, this is transformed and not only from the discourse, not only from the dialog but also by sitting next to a person from another culture, working together, helping each other, sometimes helps better to break the stereotypes to work and laugh together, explaining together a history than theorizing a lot about racism and xenophobia.

(Interview with Julia)

The educator who stated these words (the prior quote) highlights the important of living together and establishing a common dialog among all the participant people, regardless of their origin, as a way to overcome the racist prejudices. By having a friend from another culture is a way to try to understand the other and respect his or her culture. The educators I interviewed highlight this topic as one of the most outstanding element of identity of the school. It has to be taken into account that at the moment of the data collection for this study one of the most burning topics in the Spanish society was the topic of immigration (and still is). The debate about the acceptance or not of the people

coming from other countries such as Morocco, Senegal, Ecuador, or Pakistan was in everybody's mouth and was a daily discussion topic in most all the daily life spaces.

E1: And of course I am aware of the same, also the participants take notice. They are smart, and they see that so and so just arrived. And see, she already knows to read better than I do. Because the first day they do not say a word, they struggle with reading. Well, it is hard to express yourself. Then soon they feel comfortable and they speak much better. And to that I was thinking, look this poor thing that came without shoes, in small boats in very bad conditions; they won't know how to read. Well, many times they have been in school, and they know Arab and if they come from Morocco they also know French. And then not only do the ones that are illiterate come, but also very intelligent people, that have studied in their country but well that here they have to start over. Then you start looking at them differently.

(Interview with Margarita)

In this quote the educator does an important reflection, and it is living together, creating and sharing spaces with immigrant people that changes the perception of them. The role that this dialogic model plays is crucial, because without the creation of the spaces, in which everybody can bring their knowledge, the immigrant people will not have as many opportunities to share what they already know; therefore it will be hidden and those qualities will not be acknowledged. The possibility of dialog had a central role in the change of attitude of this educator on what she thought about the immigrant people. Therefore this transformation is an achievement of the dialogic management model.

### The school participation in the community

The educators as well as the participants emphasize the great involvement that the school has in the community. The school participation in the organization that coordinates all the neighborhood organizations, VERN, as well as the activities developed in other spaces such as the ones for FACEPA, the Catalan federation of educational and cultural associations of adult education are an example. The next educator, for example, highlights the role that the school has in the history of the neighborhood, from a social implication point of view:

E4: This school is part of the organization that coordinates all the neighborhood organizations, VERN. And not only on paper, because it was one of the founders, but because the school is responsible for the organization of many activities and events, for example in the neighborhood fiesta, the spring party, or the many mobilizations we have done, or when we dream what neighborhood we wanted and we are involved in the neighborhood actions. Well, the demonstrations, I wasn't there, but when the demonstrations for the subway, or when the claims to stop the demolition of the rural houses close by and to give them a social use. The demonstrations for the Catalan, for the statute, against NATO, everything the school is involved, because historically the school was born from the neighborhood. Well, in this neighborhood there was nothing, no services, there were only houses, there were not even bakeries, then the neighbors knew they wanted at least the basic services such as a kindergarten, a school for adults, a library, social services, and then they claimed the building to cover the needs of this area, and I think that this character of coming up from the neighborhood demands has never disappeared, it has always been connected. Not only to the coordinator organization, but also Agora and Heura (the participants associations) have a presence and maintain many relationships with the public services.

(Interview with Luisa)

On the other hand, this social involvement is present in the relationships with the world and the daily activities such as the spaces of political representation. The existence of these spaces of participation also means the opportunity to channel the claims of the participants and create partnerships and friendships with other schools and organizations of adult education. In some sense, this is a way of spreading the dialogic management and having impact in other areas and spaces, through the active participation of the adult participants, just like this educator explains:

E3: And also through the Literacy Conferences, this solidarity with other people who are learning, and that maybe doesn't have the resources that we have in Verneda, because this school has worked for many years. Form the associations and maybe there are places in Catalonia or in Spain that they are just starting and we encourage them and the energy of the participant people is contagious so other people also start processes to claim their ideas and ask for more classes, volunteers, materials, new technologies, and more suitable schedules for their needs.

(Interview with Julia)

The participation of the adult participants in forums such as the conferences, for example, also is a way to promote the model of dialogic management and dialogic participation to more spaces and more people will learn about it; this way other groups and organizations can be engaged in the development of this model of organization.



### The participation of educators in the school spaces

The school of la Verneda – Sant Martí works on the basis of participation and management of the participant people through two associations, Àgora and Heura, which are the ones in charge of making decisions that affect the whole school. In addition, there are many spaces to promote and manage this participation, in order to provide the maximum number of possibilities for everybody to participate (in fact, the existence of these channels are key elements to ensure the participation of all the people involved in the school). These spaces are the Monthly Commission (COME), and the Weekly Commission (COSE) mainly, although for each activity a Planning Commission of activities is created by participants and volunteers. In addition, there is also the annual conference, and other events and meetings. All these spaces that I have mentioned previously in this dissertation are completely open to the participation of the participants. In fact, some of them are exclusively reserved for the participants; this is the case of the two associations that manage the school. The associations are composed by the participants that register in the school (Agora is mixed and Heura is only for women). A person, just for registering at the school, becomes a member of the association. This is what one of the interviewed educators stated during the data collection:

E3: In the association board meetings no, because the workers (in this case civil servant) do not participate, because the associations are autonomous, if some day they invite us because they want to discuss a topic then we go, but if not, it is self-governed.

(Interview with Julia)

This autonomy is very important, because it is the guarantee that in fact the school is really managed by the participants, and not by a board of directors made of civil servants that work in the school.

However, the innovative element of this school is that the main management spaces are open to an egalitarian participation of all the people involved in the center (participants, volunteers and educators). This quote is an example of this dynamics:

I: And what did you do during that meeting?

E1: Well, in this meeting, we were participants, educators, volunteers, everybody... everybody who wants to come, we went to the Sau, we went by bus. There they explained to us about new technologies, and the new applications, about the digital blackboard and they did a presentation and we were all open-mouthed...

(Interview with Margarita)

The two-day conference is one of the main spaces of participation and management of the school because it is where everybody dreams what education they want, which kind of resources and activities, etc. In this case in the two-day conference there was the claim to have more digital resources for the school (in agreement with the demands of the informational society in which we live). An important issue is that the school counts with the participation of all the people involved from an egalitarian dialogic direction. This is what sets the difference between La Verneda and other adult education centers. The participation of the educators gets established in an egalitarian framework.

### The dialogic functioning

Just as one of the educators I interviewed for this study stated:

E4: All the management system of the school is based on the egalitarian dialog. In the dialog from the arguments you provide and not the power position you hold.

(Interview with Luisa)

In this school the educators do not have power positions relationships with the participants. On the contrary, the aim is to generate common spaces in which the dialog is the only tool to reach agreements and create consensus. This way of working is also implemented inside the classrooms as an essential component of the pedagogical practice. In the next quote another educator explains what she does in class to promote egalitarian dialog and include the diverse ways to solve and explain a certain concept:

I: Do you ask people to collaborate and help each other

E1: yes, yes, I have been in the class and said, look this that you are asking me, since you finished, explain it to this other person and since I am helping another person, can you two work together?

(Interview with Margarita)

The most important consequence of this approach is the inclusion of the voices of the participants that otherwise will not be represented. Therefore, this approach is a way to stimulate the participation and the involvement of everybody.

E4: But I think that the main characteristic of this management is the inclusion of the collectives namely excluded in all and each of the phases of management, in this case they are not in the margins, they are inside, they take part and are part of each and every phase, we are talking in this case of projects, of managing a particular activity, or being in class, no? In any moment the participants can say what they think and manage that area.

(Interview with Luisa)

This way of working usually amazes the educators. The educators that had experiences of working in other organizations and other schools are surprised at how the school of Verneda works in that area. One example of that is the next quote of one of the interviewed educators:

E3: Well, it is very different to what I knew, but very interesting. I saw there were a lot of participants that the meetings were open to everyone and, that surprised me a lot. Because I was coming from a very different practice in which the meetings were for faculty only, very hierarchical although not theoretically, because everyone can talk, but in the practice only the board of directors would talk and the other people listened. And of course, it surprised me a lot here because there were educators, volunteers and participants and you didn't know who was whom, at the beginning I wasn't able to tell.

(Interview with Julia)

On the other hand, their participation is a way of including a particular point of view and ways of approaching issues and understanding the education that otherwise

would not be possible. In some sense, this breaks the idea of representation and the same participant people are the ones who defend their ideas in first person:

E3: Let's see, usually in the school, we have a moment for the general assembly, the assembly at the beginning of the year, in which we try to insist on the new people how the school works, this assembly is organized and explained by the participants. They explain it from their point of view, what is one Commission doing and what the multicultural Commission is or why they are there, what have they achieved and what they want. Of course, it is very different that a participant explains about a project than if I do it, so they will explain why they are doing it and how. It reaches more people than if I do it. I am recalling some moments when we go places with a participant, they are the ones that always the ones that pull it off in the end. Because they explain their life experiences, for me, this is my job, it is different, and then it is very important that the participants explain not only in that initial moment but in any occasion. For that reason we have to be aware of opening those spaces in which the participants involved can explain to the other what and how they do it and why are they doing it.

(Interview with Julia)

This sort of functioning is elemental. In fact, this educator states that without the participation of all the people in the management of the school, La Verneda will have no sense:

I: Why is it important for the participants to be in those spaces?

E3: Because without them it will have no sense. It is their voice, no? It is the voice of the participant people and their decisions which makes the situations common, so dialogic, communicative, without their voice, without their vote, our vision will be very much

biased, as professionals. It will be very hard to know what they want. In addition, we know, at least I know, and I think we all know that our role is to precisely listen to the voices of the participants and not the other way around.

(Interview with Julia)

In fact, it is the egalitarian participation that makes everyone feel the school is theirs, as a shared and common project.

I: Why do you think it is important the representation and the active participation of everyone?

E2: Because I was telling you before, no? It is very important because if you participate you make it yours. Nobody gives it to you, you are creating it. Then, you see yourself as protagonist of your own process because you are participating in it.

(Interview with Cristina)

### Management spaces in the school of Verneda – Sant Martí

This educator explains that the most surprising thing of the school of Verneda – Sant Martí is the decision making process and how the center is managed:

I: What is the most surprising thing for the people who come to visit the school?

E3: Yes, that everyone has a voice. And that this voice is in an egalitarian level. That everyone has a vote and that the decisions are taken with democracy and consensus.

(Interview with Julia)

Briefly, the school works on the basis of the participation of all participants in the management, in dialog with educators on how to conduct the activities of the school.

E4: But, since we are talking about associations of people without basic academic qualifications, these people do not have those abilities. The writing of a grant project is an academic ability that the participants lack; therefore, the team that works every day in the school covers that need. That is why there is a collaboration between participants and educators, and in fact this team works to make the voice of the participants heard.

(Interview with Luisa)

The most important concept is that the work is a collaboration between the educators and participants. This collaboration is in all levels: inside the classroom, as I explained in the prior section, but also in other activities of the school, such as the case of the projects, for example:

E4: In many occasions the projects need a first interview with the Department that is launching the call for projects, both if it is a public or a private call. Visit the departments and have a meeting so they know you, because they receive many submissions. Then, that is just to introduce yourself and explain why you want that project. As well as presenting the organization, the association. In those meetings there are always participant people and one of the persons from the daily team accompanies them; this is one of the persons who is hired for the projects in the associations.

(Interview with Luisa)

The next quote is from an educator that explains how they always go with the participants even when they have to establish a dialog with the administrations, to obtain grants or to submit proposals for projects to different calls. The following is another example of this collaboration between educators and participants, in this case is about how the European projects work and how they are conducted from the school:

E4: There is a project management Commission. That is, a group in charge of the following of the project, monitoring and foreseeing future activities, planning and distributing tasks among the partners and evaluating how each partner is working. What is happening, assessing, monitoring and planning and the participants are involved in that, which is totally innovative. In many occasions, when we submit the final reports to the European Commission, we have had to present our project in a European level, and they highly valued the process because it gathers the theoretical part and the practice in which the participants are managing and in charge of the planning. In the European Commission forms for the projects there is a specific question about how the target group will participate in the project?

(Interview with Luisa)

This collaboration between participants and educators is another characteristic of the dialogic model and sets the difference with other approaches and ways of organizing. This is the idea that another educator stated:

E4: In most of the international meetings for the European projects I have never seen a participant person from another organization; they are always the administrators, the directors... they are always the professionals in the academic sense, you know?

(Interview with Luisa)



This is quite common among other organizations of adult education. Like this person said:

E2: Unfortunately the most current model is the other, the model in which the professionals do, teach and the participants receive.

(Interview with Cristina)

This is the reason why the school of La Verneda – Sant Martí surprises so many with its functioning, as illustrated by the words of the following educator:

E4: On the other hand, when you get there, you are with the participant person and you introduce him or her as the president of the associations, the person who manages the organization. You explain the association and that the participants are individuals without basic qualifications and that my main purpose of being in the meeting is to translate what the participant person has to say, and they are amazed.

(Interview with Luisa)

The activities of the school are also managed and monitored from the management spaces of the school presented previously. The projects, for example, are developed by the technical team but under the supervision of the participants that are always part of those teams. This educator states that the COME, COSE and association board meetings are the spaces where the participants ask for explanations and make decisions with regard to the activities being developed from the school.

E4: It is within the mixed Commissions (educators and participants) that the projects are assessed. This mixed Commission is created specifically for each project, and also in the other management spaces there is a follow-up of the projects. If something has to be solved it is mainly in the associations meetings that it is discussed.

(Interview with Luisa)

The collaboration is not restricted to those spaces. At any given moment, anywhere there is always collaboration between educators and participants; this is an example:

E4: As well as with the meetings, the mixed Commissions have a forward-looking approach, they know what has to be done, if a partner is working or not. You [as an educator] can say what this partner is doing or not and if they are abiding with the deadlines, but the participants know how to find out, they know how to detect the problems, and they know how to tell you that, there are moments that they even inquire about a specific issue or in informal meetings they will ask about the project, how is this partner working?

(Interview with Luisa)

Making decisions with this approach helps to avoid biased decisions. On the contrary, there is a constant push to ensure that all the decisions are reached by consensus of the participants:

E2: If you want to move a garbage can you do it, but in things of ideology or future purposes and decisions are taken by consensus, nobody can make a decision or even a single group, for example COSE (mainly educators). Only the Center Council can decide, in which all the participants are represented, on changes such as new approaches, structures, new ideas, schedule changes... anything...

(Interview with Cristina)

### Achievements of the management

The educators indicate that the dialogic management stands out because it achieves things that other management models do not achieve. Just like the participants stated before, the educators point out achievements both from the point of view of social impact as well as personal. Another of the contributions they have made discusses their own educational practices.

The dialogic management approach is useful to break many barriers. In the following quotes, one of the educators gives an example about one of the participants, the president of one of the associations, that skillfully knew how to address one of the councilors (cultural affairs Minister) of the Catalan Government to present the initiatives of the school. This example demonstrates how the egalitarian dialog approach and the ways of doing (of the participant) have become a reference that allow breaking all kinds of barriers, and even institutional barriers, as in this case.

E4: We were attending an event, the presentation of the website for the volunteers or something like that and we had to tell the councilor [cultural affairs Minister] of the

Catalan government that we were there, that the Heura association received the invitation and that we were pleased to attend. Well, the councilor was surrounded by people and I was really cautious, I couldn't get there, and I keep telling her [the participant] how are we going to do it? And then she told me, don't worry, follow me. She had the presence, as soon as she saw the moment, she turned around and addressed the councilor, she introduced herself and explained who she was and why we were there, with a lot of diplomacy. And I was there behind her, silent, without knowing what to do, and she knew what to do. The fact of not having an academic qualification does not mean that participants are missing or have a shortage of x, or that they don't know what they want.

(Interview with Luisa)

The dialogic management not only is useful to break barriers, it is also a way to include all the voices and this way, live much more enriching experiences like the one of this educator:

I: Why do you think it is important to have different people in the school, in terms of culture, ethnicity, and country of origin...

E4: Because it is enriching, I guess this is everybody's answer. It is enriching for the project, because it allows you to have different points of view. If it was totally homogeneous, we will only have one point of view. With heterogeneity we have multiple responses, and we can answer to a broad range of needs, because there is a broad range of solutions. It enriches and strengthens and provides a lot of energy to the school.

(Interview with Luisa)

Another of the main achievements of this dialogic approach from the social transformation point of view is the creation of dialog spaces in which everybody respects

each other. This is a basic element for the development of a democratic attitude and a critical and responsible citizenry.

I: Which kind of transformations do you think the school has done to the participants?

E3: The transformations are always very obvious and are one of the things that most emotion creates. In your daily work. There are a lot of transformations, for example, learning to listen. And with this one, also to respect other people's opinion and value the differences, this is very important. Another important issue is the respect of the human rights.

(Interview with Julia)

Specifically, how the school functions and how it gets involved with the community has served for participating and/or leading transformations easily observable in the day-to-day life of the neighborhood. This is the case of having the authorities to put the subway, the construction of a pedestrian area for the people of the area (Guipúzcoa Avenue), or the fact to have a cordial and welcoming neighborhood in which there is a strong sense of community.

I: How do you think the school has changed the neighborhood, or the city?

E2: A lot, a lot, this is one of the things that from time to time I think about and one of the things that brings me joy and lots of emotions, you know? There are a lot of repercussions for the social dynamics of the neighborhood. That is, well, the improvements of the neighborhood, transportation, services, new facilities for the neighborhood. The school has always been present in all that. It has been in the movements for the subway and for the pedestrian avenue. We are the first and the only

ones making the people of the neighborhood protagonists of it and for what they want.

Well, this has affected the neighborhood in a way that I think there has been a cultural development of the neighborhood. It is more participative and all that has a lot to do with the school. That is, people have experienced those changes from different dynamics through their participation, maybe some have participated from their neighborhood association and others from the school. But it is the union of all these people. You will find groups of people made by former and current participants and we all get along. Everybody greets each other... Here life is very social, and I think it has a lot to do with the school, in the expectations of the people; it is a complete development, personal and collective. The school is like the engine...

(Interview with Cristina)

Another achievement of this participatory approach is for the school (participant people) to gain access to as many different spheres as possible (neighborhood, but also in the regional government, state government and even to have an international presence).

I: What transformation do you think has the school made towards the neighborhood, the community, the city or the world?

E3: Yes, in all those levels, from the neighborhood to the world. In the neighborhood, the school has participated in the claims and fight for the subway, the same building where we are located we had to fight for it, we occupied it. We have fought for the rural houses in the neighborhood which were deserted and now are services for the area, the park of Sant Marti. Many neighborhoods claiming struggles came from the school. The school has had an important presence in the neighborhood, and in adult education in the Catalan area, all the projects developed from the school, the bill of rights of the participants, in

which the school participated, also FACEPA. It is through FACEPA and CONFAPEA in the state level and also internationally.

(Interview with Julia)

The first idea educators highlight from an educational point of view is the school environment. The existence of these egalitarian dialog spaces are incentives for the participation of everybody. So it is easier to have a trusting and proximity environment but also a rigorous working place, because it is possible to create discussion spaces based on the validity claims of the arguments and not in the power positions of who states them.

I: How would you describe the environment of the school, when you come in and everyone greets each other, this welcoming environment, how would you define it?

E3: It is a feeling of proximity, of breaking barriers, of sincerity, authenticity and also being available. There is always a good mood for helping others, of saying hi and talking, laughing or joking. At the same time there is seriousness, rigorous, and we work really hard and work very well. We work a lot with high expectations and in an interactive way, therefore the dialog does not disturb others, and is not the education of silence. As the people are more involved in the management they see is different and after time they want not only to participate more but to learn more. Because is like discovering a new world and breaking with a lot of barriers and fears. People have a lot of fears, fear of learning, fear of the spelling, fear of speaking in public, of not knowing how to participate, and here these fears disappear and people learn a lot.

(Interview with Julia)

On the other hand, this way of working also generates more learning, given that the participation in the Commissions, the working groups and the general meetings also

imply learning how to organize them, which translates into the development of critical and responsible active citizenry from all the participants.

E2: It is in all the Commissions and meetings wherever the participants are that by managing the activity they learn. They learn how to set up, organize, explain, find the information, etc. and all this is part of the learning. If all that does not come up, it is our responsibility to explain it and state why but taking into account that if we [educators] are the ones explaining they will listen to us differently than if it is another participant doing the explanations.

(Interview with Cristina)

Finally, another element that the educators I interviewed emphasize, and it is collateral but not less important, is the fact that the education offered is free. Somehow the free of charge education is part of this educational approach because it believes in education as an act of solidarity. Just like this educator states, this is a very important element to take into account:

E3: I think it is very important to have volunteers in the school, and we understand the voluntary work as a collaboration of each individual as they can, without the need to count on how many hours and minutes, but as a part of that person who has continuity and it is part of their personal life and their participation in this big project is voluntary. Another important element is that the education is free. This is something that the school has always fought for and this is something I admire. Because it is really difficult to do a job that is really public and that costs nothing to the people. It was really hard to find, because other places for one reason or another will find a way to make people pay. I really admire that education in this school is free. I admire that and this is one of the



things that has given me meaning in my educational job, the fact that there are so many activities to choose from and that all is free.

(Interview with Julia)

***Summary of the dialogic management analysis from the educators' point of view***

At the beginning of this study I had three research questions directed to the participant people. In this section I present an analysis of their contributions in dialog with the contributions of educators. For that purpose in this section discussion I take into account the initial questions of the study, doing a detailed analysis equally to the analysis presented for the participant people.

The participant people emphasize that one of the most important elements of the dialogic approach of management in adult education is that it fosters the participation and valuing of their points of view, their demands and the kind of activities they want and how they want them. For the participants the dialogic management approach means to feel the center as theirs, as a space where they can bring their worries, their knowledge and experiences and share with others to build a critical and quality education. The educators also share this point of view. They highlight this way of management as an approach that guarantees that the school (and educators) offer closely what the participants demand. In both cases all the participants of the study (participants and educators) highlight a common element, which is the importance of creating egalitarian spaces in which all the individuals have the same opportunity to participate and in which their contributions are valued in the basis of their validity claims (and not on power

relations). These spaces (in the school are the conferences, COME, COSE, etc.) made this objective of equality easier to achieve, although the usual dynamics of society in which we have been socialized are not always egalitarian. Therefore, it is important to have a proactive attitude to promote egalitarian relationships. Just as one of the educators in a communicative discussion group for the study stated:

For me, for example, doing dialogic management for a project means to work together people and teams that usually don't work together. Work with participant people, groups of participants, groups of educators, etc. Working together to achieve different issues, from completing a project, to the topic of the project, how to develop the project in the organization, foreseeing the results, working out the impact of it, maybe meet the politicians and the administration ... for me this is working in an egalitarian approach.  
(Educators communicative discussion group)

The fact that every person I interviewed for this study highlighted the importance of these spaces of participation is evidence that reaffirms the idea that equality (in the sense of egalitarian dialog) is a condition for the one in which everyone has to work every day. In addition, the interactions that take place in those egalitarian spaces are a successful way to achieve this kind of dialog, based in validity claims and directed towards achieving consensus.

The management is conducted from all the sectors involved in the project that means from the person who lives in this neighborhood to the ones who work here. The basis is on the arguments provided, not on the role of the person who is in that moment coordinating or managing a project. The power is on the best argumentation and there are

a lot of theoretical basis... or theoretical approaches in social sciences and education which are engaged in observing the possibilities of the system and the people, from both points of view, but also the same experience of the school working for 27 years with this kind of organization has brought continuous improvements and we have been creating our own theory. We are able to see what we need in each moment.

(Educators communicative discussion group)

The educators also agree with the participants on the evaluation of the consequences of this dialogic approach. In all the cases they highlighted the ideas of solidarity achieved between all individuals, overcoming of barriers, increase of self-esteem, and valuing all contributions regardless of who makes them, etc. All these elements make this educational practice a liberating and transforming experience. The educators add another point of view, from their own reflection on their educational practices and the interactions that they have with participants inside and out of the classroom: the benefits that this way of organization has for the acquisition of knowledge.

This educator stated that everybody learns, both participants and educators:

One of the things that surprised me the most was on a personal level, the amount of things you get to learn, because although you think that this is all dialogic, you still have in your head, I am the expert and I will do it in a very dialogical way but I know more. Because, let's see, this is what they have put in our heads. And then you get here and you see constantly people explaining things to you that you didn't know, this is what in a personal level has been more enriching for me. Not only you are teaching but they are teaching you, and with that you grow, and is like a domino effect, it makes you think in different ways and in other approaches.

(Educators communicative discussion group)

Several of the educators I interviewed for this study stated that the learning experiences are much more enriching in a context with a dialogic organization. This situation is as such because all the individuals have the confidence to provide their experiences, points of view and between all of them they are able to make sense of the academic knowledge of the official curriculum. The next quote is an example of this statement:

What I see in the dialogic management of the classroom is that it starts from the bottom, you are not a conductor of a band, it is the opposite it all begins from the bottom. For example when there is a question it is amazing to see how they get organized to help each other, and that is something that I have never witnessed before. It is fascinating, I don't know where it came from, but I think it has a lot to do with the mixture of ages, ideologies, etc, that creates that different environment, no? The people mature faster in an environment like that. The attitude is much more positive, I have never seen that before, this kind of help between participants, like staying during the break to explain each other doubts, it is fascinating.

(Educators communicative discussion group)

In this case, this management approach achieves the purpose of breaking barriers in all levels: in the organization of the center, in the learning inside the classroom, in the interactions and in the same people. The barriers between different people disappear, between the people who work in the center and the people who take classes and the people who participate in the management of the school activities. The participants not only attend the school of Verneda to learn. The school works because the participants

take part in the management. The educators also take part in the management, bringing knowledge and experience just like another member of the educative community. Dialog is a main tool through which the participation is channeled. By means of all these interactions, the distance (epistemological gap) usually found in other schools between the board of directors and administration of the school and learners here disappears. In Verneda, all these groups are not separated and hierarchically organized. On the contrary, the collaboration and solidarity is the motor of the interactions in the school. This is the case of many comments by both educators and participants in the center.

E8: when talking about democratic management it is always identified as this, as formal spaces of participation in which people can say their ideas. I think is important to say that the democratic management is highly connected to the environment of the school. I mean, it is also democratic management when a person [participant] feels free to walk into the teachers' lounge, or feels free to be here or to go to class. This is what we were saying, that people can participate and in a given moment say if they don't agree, I don't like that. This is an environment in which debate is continuously allowed, in any moment, in the hallways, in the secretary, here; there... this environment makes the democratic management, because it doesn't make sense to create a space of participation in which not everybody is deciding.

(Educators communicative discussion group)

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS**

At the beginning of this research I studied the different organizational models in adult education. The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of the dialogic approach in the management and organization of the center of adult education of Verneda – Sant Martí. The literature review showed that the study of the organization and functioning of the adult education centers is closely related with a great diversity of aspects. These aspects are democracy, participation, dialog, a critical review of the educator role inside and out of the classroom, the ability of participants deciding what education they want, lifelong learning, power relations in the structures of decision making inside the school, creating spaces of identity, and the impact of the social context in the functioning of the centers of adult education, among others. All these issues are important because they have direct consequences on the participation of adult individuals in the center of adult education. The literature review for this study showed that the successful experiences in adult education are the ones in which there are routes and channels for the participants to share their points of view and where they feel respected. On the other hand, in the experiences designed from the team of educators the participation is never as high and it always becomes one of the main problems for these centers. Just as the research I have developed in CREA (Center of Research on Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities at the University of Barcelona) during several years has taught me that adults have a lot of responsibilities in their daily life and

education only becomes a topic of interest when it arises from their own demands and when they really feel they can decide about it.

In this chapter of the dissertation I will review the research questions with which I started this study, shedding light on the analysis of the data collected in this process. For that reason I locate my review in the context of the previous research on management, organization and functioning of adult education centers, highlighting the conclusions that I can provide from the scientific debate on these issues, on the basis of the evidence found in the data analysis of the fieldwork.

As I mentioned in the literature review, there are a scarce number of studies centered in the study of management approaches in adult education from the participants' point of view. The studies I have had access to for this research make contributions in areas such as the analysis of the decision-making processes in the organizations. In most of the cases these issues are approached with regard to children's education, or these highlight the idea of including the parents' presence in the school and the positive value of connecting school and family and the effects that it has on the school results of the children (Barnett, Young, & Schweinhart, 1998; Boethel, 2004; Elboj, Puigdemívol, Soler, Valls, 2002; LaParo, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003; Marcon, 1999; Reynolds, 2000; Serico, 1998). However, there are a scarce number of studies analyzing decision making and management of adult education centers from the voices of the participants. Valls (2005) conducted a study about the communicative and sociocultural aspects of adult education focusing on a communicative management. The main idea of her research was to explore the theories behind the democratic management and the communicative organization of adult education and the communicative interactions involved.

The main contribution of my study is the voice of the participants. The ideas, reflections, and conclusions I have reached with this study are always based in the dialog I have held during the research period with the people participating in the study. After analyzing the data collected in the fieldwork (see Chapter 4 of the dissertation), I have reached the conclusion that egalitarian interactions are a common factor. Men and women participating in this research have expressed in their interviews and communicative discussion groups that in the school of Verneda there is a space in which they feel respected and secure to make contributions about the functioning and organization of the school. Forester (1993) states, in his work on educational centers, that decisions can be made from an instrumental or a communicative approach (in terms of Habermas, 1984). From his point of view, the actions that take place in the school can be a result of the intersubjective agreements between people that try to reach consensus about different issues. In the school of Verneda – Sant Martí I could also state that the way of working is based in the communicative relationships and not in the power relations. The egalitarian dialog is a tool that the participants use in this center to reach inclusive agreements that facilitate a consensus on what and how they want to organize the education in the school. This idea of management as a product of agreements can also be found in the work of Valls (2005).

The contribution of my dissertation to the debate on how the decision making occurs in the school of Verneda – Sant Martí adds another aspect to the reflections of Valls (2005) and Forester (1993): the conceptualization of the school as a space of participation. In this school it is possible to reach consensus because the participants thought of creating spaces that promote the participation of everybody. There are



different spaces that invite everybody's participation like the COME, the COSE, the two-day conferences of the school, the different Commissions, etc. There are opportunities open to all the people who register in the school. Often the meetings are in different time slots in order to promote the participation of different and more people, in different shifts, making it available for people with different responsibilities (there are people who prefer meetings in the morning, others in the afternoon or the night because they work all day). The idea of having so many open spaces for participation is a fundamental attribute. However, the most important aspect that the people I have interviewed for this study highlight is that this participation is not any kind of participation: it is an egalitarian participation and centered in the adult individuals. That is to say that the adults registered in the center are the ones who decide (through direct participation, or through the associations) how they want the center to work. And each and every one has the same opportunities to give their opinion, express their reasons and arguments. The analysis of these people's testimonies leads me to conclude that it is not enough to state that a school works on the basis of what the participants say or that the management model is based on the idea of reaching agreements. It is necessary to create the physical spaces in which to discuss and reach agreements. This is one of the main contributions of my work. Without the spaces in which to participate, the participation does not become real, just as I have observed in other experiences through the research I have conducted in CREA or through the literature review for this study.

What occurs in the dialogic management of the learning center? The main conclusions of what occurs in Verneda is that the classrooms are full, there is a large number of people that live this experience as unique and full of meaning. In Chapter 4 of

the dissertation I analyzed how both participants and educators highlighted the egalitarian conditions of the interactions that take place in the school. From the different examples that I analyzed in Chapter 4 several elements such as self-confidence, security, and a participatory environment explain the success of this management approach based in the egalitarian dialog. On the one hand, the participants stated they feel secure enough to participate and contribute with their ideas and points of view. They also stated that they had no fear suggesting their demands to the center. On the other hand, the kind of relationships generated in this context deeply motivates the participants, so there is a desire to go to the school, which becomes a daily space in the lives of these people. These two elements contribute to explain the success of the Verneda – Sant Martí experience.

The people who have participated in this study perceive that dialogic management promotes more egalitarian relationships, and for that reason, more participatory, because the agreements required the consensus of everybody. This approach is much more radical than the representative democracy of reaching agreement by means of the voting processes. This other approach does not produce satisfactory situations for everybody. The organizations (schools, organizations, council, etc.) that work on the basis of voting can fall under bad dynamics when the majority make their points of view prevail over the minorities. On the other hand, the vote of the majority is not the vote of everybody, with which there is always a part of the people involved in the organization that ends up excluded from the final decisions. On the other hand, the basic idea in the dialogic approach is the one underlining the deliberative democratic model. It is not about a position winning over the others because of votes, but to include in the final decision the voices of everybody, by means of a dialog directed to reach agreements in order to

achieve a situation by consensus. This is what occurs in the school of Verneda. They achieve agreements including all the voices, and the most important participation is strengthened (because without this participation this organizational approach will not be valid).

This aspect is important and it contributes to give a new perspective to the contributions of other researchers who have reflected on how to teach adults, from a critical point of view, for example in the case of Foley (2001), or Colin & Heaney (2002). These authors present a vision on adult education in which the same learners take the leadership of their education. Colin & Heaney (2002) state: “the interests of learners (...) demand that education be undertaken *by* and *with* students, not *to* them” (p. 31). In addition, Foley (2001) defends the idea of radical education as an approach in which the learners are the ones who take the leadership in their educational processes. Foley (2001) reviews the contributions of other authors (such as Freire or Rogers) to defend the idea of democratization of adult education. In the same direction, the dialogic management approach proposes a democratization of adult education with the participants as the protagonists of all the processes. In this dissertation I provide the evidence that demonstrates how this is possible with the direct participation of the adult individuals in environments of egalitarian dialog. In fact, after the analysis of the data collected for the study I have come to the conclusions that a transformational and critical adult education like the one that Freire (1997), Flecha (1997), Foley (2001), and Dewey (1916), among others, defend is possible as long as participation spaces are created in which the participation of all the people can take place in an egalitarian way, and in which they are

the protagonists of their education and the organization of the center is in accordance to the interests and demands of the community.

How do adult learners perceive their participation in the dialogic management? Maybe the words that better represent how the people I interviewed perceive their participation in the school are “open” and “with freedom.” In all the opportunities I had to talk to participants of the study (in the interviews, the discussion groups, observations or the later follow-up session) they always described the school as a place completely open to the participation, without barriers or obstacles. This creates distinct differences with the functioning of other educational centers, that have a hierarchical structure, in which the topics of interest are not regarded as sufficient insurance of an egalitarian dialog of everybody, but it revolves around the power relations (Sork & Caffarella, 1989). In those contexts the central topic of reflection is in regard to ethical dilemmas of planning, defined as a social activity in which the planning committee negotiates the interests (Cervero & Wilson, 1994). Cervero and Wilson (1994) place educators’ relationships and social context at the heart of the program-planning process of adult education. They highlight the implications of power struggle with regard to negotiating program purposes and learning activities only from the educator or administrator point of view. Interestingly, they state that people’s interests produce programs (Cervero & Wilson, 1994), but who are these people? These “people” are educators and administrators. There is no learner involved in the planning, negotiating, or developing of programs or learning activities. However, the people participating in the fieldwork for this study pointed out another series of topics, more related with the dynamics of deliberative processes in which individuals try to reach agreements on specific topics

concerning the management of the center. In this case, the individuals involved in the decision-making processes are concerned with including the voices of the people who traditionally have been excluded and silenced. The specific characteristic of Verneda is that this is a center managed by a principle of equality, the dialogs that people establish have an egalitarian nature (that is, the ideas are valued depending on the arguments provided and not the power position of the person). This evidence allows me to think that in this type of management the participation and dialog are central elements; at least, this is the conclusion from the analysis of the data collected and discussed with the people involved in this case study.

On the other hand, another important element from the conclusions of the data analysis that I have obtained with regard to how the participants perceive their participation in the center is the understanding of their participation as an integral approach. Their participation is not only understood from the academic point of view of attending classes, take notes and leave. It is a participation that goes further beyond the school, and it implies an emotional, personal, and communitarian involvement of the people in Verneda. Each person arrives at the school with their respective life experiences, with their responsibilities (at home, at work, in the neighborhood, with the family, etc.) and at the school all that has an impact with regards to participation. This is a more social model (Medina, 1997), that contrasts with the scholar/academic idea of participation by the adult learners in the school. This is another of the reasons why the school attracts so many people and there is a high participation rate in the center. The participants not only find a place to learn but also a place to share their experiences, their

life events, etc. All this later informs their own learning process as well as how they participate and get involved in the management of the school.

All these reasons allow me to state that for the people at Verneda involvement in the community means, mainly, to participate and interact with other individuals, share learning and knowledge, life experiences and get united in the school project of Verneda. In Chapter 4 I have presented numerous facts about this idea. This is a participation that not only has an impact on the school, but also in the neighborhood and even internationally (as the partnership with Porto Alegre, for example, shows) or the development of projects with other European countries. The school in that sense is a motor for a social movement that has transformed (and is transforming) the context in which it is located. The adult participants are very much aware and they explain how this approach and this way of functioning makes it possible to transform the dreams and claims into realities.

Finally, I would like to conclude with the idea that the study of dialogic management within community organizations is relevant to adult education and to the social sciences. On the one hand, this study presented practices that promote emancipation, liberation, and social awareness. On the other hand, this research involves elements that promote practices in which individuals can accurately define what they want, and therefore, make possible the definition of educational practices that contribute to the overcoming of inequalities. In addition, this is a model of organization that explains one of the approaches to stimulate the participation in the management of adult educational centers.

### **Implications of the Study**

Dialogic management is an important contribution to the research and practice of adult education. For that reason, the implications for the practice, and the implications for the research field of adult education will be presented.

The contribution of this study to research is that it extends the knowledge on organizational learning and knowledge management since it offers new perspectives on how to involve the learners in the management of the organization by giving the center of the action to the main actors of the process. It also fills the gap in the study of adult education centers management by providing insights from the adult learners' perspectives. This organizational approach provides the environment for a twofold learning, an instrumental learning and an organizational learning. On the other hand, this research builds on the theorization of popular education into the academic field of adult education because dialogic management in the adult school of La Verneda-Sant Martí a) is rooted to the interests of the people in the community, b) the process is both political and critical, c) it seeks social change, d) the process is with and from the community, and e) it connects social action and education.

Participation and the democratization of the institutions is not a dream from the past; this is something that today is possible and achievable in adult education. This research presents a case study that describes the characteristics necessary to accomplish this goal. These attributes entail dedication and effort by all the stakeholders. Dialogic management provides the resources to the individuals to become active citizens in their communities. Schugurensky (2005) states that "citizenship is closely connected with

democracy, and democracy is inseparable from issues of equality, participation and self-governance” (p. 10). All these qualities are some of the basic elements of the dialogic management. This model of management is not only applicable to adult basic education but to many other areas of life.

This research may inform areas of study within adult education such as Human Resource Development, Policy Studies or Higher Education or Student Affairs and many others in other fields of study such as political sciences (i.e. political theory), or sociology (i.e., sociology of organizations). Complementary studies to my research will be to analyze the management of other organizations conducting adult education from the standpoint of the groups in higher risk of social exclusion or whose voices are less likely to be heard, and organizations which have the potential to promote participatory democracy and active citizenship.

The principal implication for the practice of adult education is that dialogic management promotes participation. This participation is not only participation in the learning center but participation in a broader sense that is in the neighborhood organizations, in the community, the city, etc. Dialogic management can be viewed by the center as a means of providing better communication with the community in which the center is located. This management model is already changing the practices of adult education centers in Catalonia and Spain. It is through organizations like FACEPA and CONFAPEA that the same participants encourage other learners in different areas of the country to create participant’s associations to actively participate in the decision making of their learning centers.



The findings of this study contribute to the literature in this field of study providing the perception of adult learners in adult education to the literature on organizational learning and management as well as to adult basic education. The case presented in this dissertation showed that participants, volunteers, and educators learned skills, attitudes, and knowledge from participating in the dialogic management in a shared governance adult education center. The skills, attitudes, values, and knowledge learned from the decision-making processes transfer from the school spaces (classroom, meetings) to spaces beyond the center into other spaces of participation in society.

Learning the perception of the learners on the dialogic management through their voice is important because learners are the end-users of the public service of education provided by the Government and they very much care about how this education is facilitated to them and how decisions are made.

Dialogic management is an organizational model that promotes the conditions where participants take part in the creation of the spaces for programming participation and decision making, among others. This approach is developed with the collaboration and mutual respect between educators and participants. In addition, this cooperation is based in the understanding that adult education has the purpose to serve the participant persons' needs and demands and not the educators' or the administrators' interests. This study contributes to the power struggle that adult education professionals have with the great responsibility of learning how to share their power and create spaces for equality, even if they do not find themselves in the school of La Verneda.

This dissertation connects popular education history and practices to educational and social theories of learning. And it presents to the State administration that different approaches in adult education can be developed and achieve successful results.

As may be noted from this study, considerable participation took place as a result of the dialogic model. This organizational and learning approach is not only a methodology but a philosophic orientation in the field of adult education.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Further detailed examination of learning processes, or specific applications of the dialogic management of the center involved in this study, could continue to develop useful findings. In particular, further examinations of this model could assist in understanding its flexibility and purpose when applied to current issues in adult education such as current issues of immigration or gender violence. Other researchers may use the findings of this study as a foundation for future research on this topic. For example, future research can examine the relationship between organizational and educational practices and changes in government policies in adult education. Further exploration of this topic should consider why egalitarian dialog in the dialogic management promoted greater participation than other interactions in other schools. At its best, a critical adult education such as the dialogic management of adult education centers offers to learners and educators by working together, in equality, the path to make a better society where nobody is left excluded. By means of embracing democracy, social justice, and citizenship I can say that “another adult education is possible.”

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**APPENDIX A**  
**LIST OF QUESTIONS**

## APPENDIX A

The following are the communicative in-depth interview and communicative focus groups starting questions approved by the Institutional Review Board at Northern Illinois University. These are a list of discussion topics that I covered and the “starter” questions for each topic.

### Topic: Dialogic management and school/ center functioning

- What is dialogic management?
- How does it work?
- What occurs in the dialogic management of the learning center?
- How do you interact with the community?
- How do you perceive dialogic management promotes?

### Topic: Participation in the dialogic management

- Why do people participate in the management of the center?
- How do you perceive your involvement in this process?

### Topic: Involvement in the community and learning

- What does being involved in the community mean?
- How do you understand participation and learning?
- How do you perceive other individuals' participation?

**APPENDIX B**  
**TABLE CATEGORIES**

## APPENDIX B

**Table 5: Number of segments coded by category**

<b>Code System</b>	<b>Number of segments coded</b>
History	14
Recognition	5
Immigration--class consciousness	4
Racism	4
School Attraction	6
Time and activity	64
VERN	3
FACEPA	5
Congresses	5
Commissions	6
School Associations	14
Porto Alegre Commission	4
Definitions	0
Dialogic Learning	0
Solidarity	2
Equality of differences	1
Egalitarian dialog	1
Dialogic management	14
Management spaces	0
Organization-functioning	52
Relationships	42
Participation	77
Achievements of management	15
Needs and demands	21
Decision making	18
Participation perception	23
Social transformation	33
Self-esteem and self-confidence	20
Self-awareness	5
Learning community	22
Participation	25
Voluntary work	13
Learning	27
Active learning	5
Citizenship	4
Democracy	9
Participation	3
Democratic participation	1
Governance	12
Values	0
Autonomy	1
Solidarity	5
Readiness for equity	4
Readiness for innovative practices	3